NEW

From the makers of retro GAMER

The Mega Drive Book

Everything you need to know about Sega's 16-bit masterpiece

Includes The Super NES Book

Welcome to

The Mega Drive Book

When it was first released in October 1988, Sega desperately needed a home hit. Its previous 8-bit consoles had failed to break the stranglehold that Nintendo had created with the NES, leaving Sega with a small window of opportunity before Nintendo released its own 16-bit console. The end result was the Mega Drive — or Genesis as it's known in the US — an excellent machine that, buoyed by a host of stunning conversions and original IPs like *Sonic The Hedgehog*, managed to loosen Nintendo's iron grip on the market. Exclusives like *Ecco The Dolphin*, *The Story Of Thor*, *Castle Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse* and of course Sonic delivered exciting arcade-styled gameplay that made home computers and Nintendo's NES pale in comparison. So join us for this huge celebration of Sega's fantastic console and relive its highlights including some of the best games to ever appear on its 16-bit masterpiece.

In association with retro GAMER magazine

The Mega Drive Book

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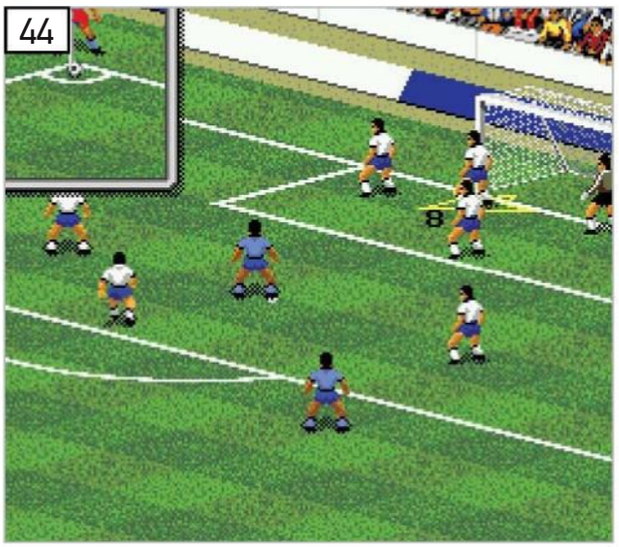

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SEGA'S 16-BIT HIT

THE MEGA DRIVE/GENESIS WAS SEGA'S MOST SUCCESSFUL CONSOLE, DELIVERING A WEALTH OF FANTASTIC DIVERSE GAMES THAT HELPED THE MACHINE SELL IN THE MILLIONS. WE EXPLAIN WHAT MADE SEGA'S CONSOLE SO ESSENTIAL

Modem Wars
Sega dabbled in modem usage for the Mega Drive. Nagumo-san explained, "It was called Mega-Modem, whose sales date was November 3, 1990. It is a modem unit for Mega Drive that enabled online game communication. It used analogue lines and its connection speed was 1,200bps. The service named 'Game Toshokan' enabled downloading of games, delivery of Sega-related news and online matches." Records vary wildly on how many games utilised online play (one source stating six). We only found solid confirmation regarding *TEL TEL Mah-Jong* and Stadium titles. More interestingly was the 'Game Toshokan', which allowed downloading of games like *Phantasy Star* text adventures, *Pyramid Magic* and *Flicky* to a special cartridge. Closing in 1993, fans worried the online-only games would be forever lost. Luckily in 1994 there were two Mega-CD compilations, *Sega Games Can Vol 1* and *2*, which included nearly all-available titles. Prized among *Phantasy Star* collectors, these are incredibly rare.

Nintendo's fate has often been intertwined with the Mega Drive system. It has long had a history of benefiting from Sega in one form or another, often due to the direct competitive challenge it posed. The SNES would have been nothing without the MD; the reverse is also true. It was the Mega Drive that pushed Nintendo's into updating its aged NES hardware, and it was also the Mega Drive that changed the market forever, cutting a trail towards the situation today. It is undeniably one of the most important pieces of hardware in gaming history. So it should have come as no surprise to find that MD games would support Nintendo's Wii system. In a moment of irony, it must be noted that Sega had already dabbled in downloadable MD games with The Sega Channel, making its announcement quite apt. The decision was obvious. Later Sega systems would prove difficult, technically, and also the MD was far more successful than the Master System. As will be shown, the MD can be credited for many things – it was a magical high Sega never again reached.

The Japanese debut was October 29, 1988. The widespread American release was less than a year later in 1989, while the United Kingdom had to wait roughly another year before it arrived in November 1990. To fully understand the importance of the Mega Drive's launch, you need to know what the international climate was like during the decadent Eighties.

Sega had already entered the console fray previously, with the successive releases of its SG-1000 Mark I, II and III systems in Japan (1981-1985), the 3rd model of which was redesigned as the Master System for Western countries. To be bluntly honest, despite it being technically superior to the Famicom/NES, it was a commercial failure that never gained more than a 5% market share. Only in Brazil was it able to officially eclipse Nintendo's 8-bit hardware. Throughout the mid-to-late Eighties Japan's console market was controlled almost entirely by the Famicom, which was popular beyond description. America was gripped by the NES, again with near total market dominance. The NES was also available in Europe and the UK, though Britannia was more enamoured with 8-bit micros than high-priced consoles.

In 1987 Hudson Soft and NEC jointly released the PC-Engine against the Famicom, two years later redesigning and releasing it in America as the TurboGrafx 16. When Sega decided to position its MD as a third competitor, the odds must have seemed impossibly high. According to David Sheff, Hiroshi Yamauchi dismissed Sega as not being a threat. Yamauchi was more concerned with NEC, which was investing roughly $3.7 billion into R&D, an amount greater than Nintendo's then annual sales. Sega meanwhile was only a $700 million company, and one founded by an American. As an underdog scrapping against NEC for second place, Sega and its MD was underestimated,

Year Released: Japan: 1988 USA: 1989 UK: 1990

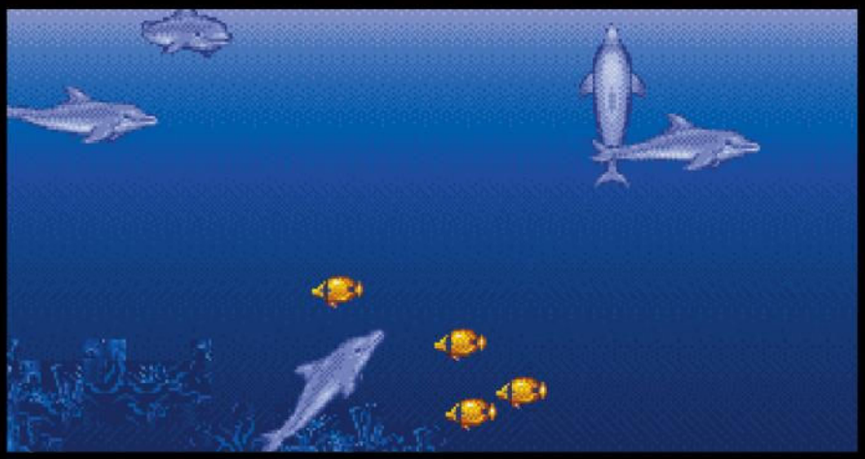
Original Price: Japan: 21,000 Yen USA: $189.99 UK: £189.99

Buy it now for: £15+ ($30+)

Associated Magazines: Beep! Megadrive, Mega Drive Fan, GameFan, Mean Machines, Sega Visions Magazine

Why the Mega Drive was great… The Mega Drive ushered in the 16-bit era; some say the last golden era of gaming. It was a special kind of scene to be a part of. No explanation, no mix of words or screenshots or memories can ever touch that sense of knowing, that you were there, playing those great games during that point in time. Though this age has sadly passed, newcomers still need to understand.

SEGA'S 16-BIT HIT



» **Above and right:** *Ecco The Dolphin*, like many Mega Drive classics, has been re-released on various compilations.

"ATARI WAS OFFERED THE GENESIS AND JACK TRAMIEL TURNED IT DOWN. JACK THOUGHT THE DEAL WAS TOO EXPENSIVE" MICHAEL KATZ

Hybrid Children
A sign of the Mega Drive's popularity is the number of variations that exist. Beyond your standard models, there was the JVC Wondermega (Xeye in America), which combined MD and Mega-CD. Then there was the much smaller combined Multi-Mega (CDX in America), doubling as a portable CD player. Following this musical theme, there was the Aiwa CSD-GM1, combining the MD/MCD with a portable "Boom Box" radio. From CD to LD, Sega's champion was also included with Pioneer's Laseractive. MSX fans will be interested to know it was integrated into the AX-330 and AX-990 models, for Arabic distribution in Kuiwait and Yemen. Computer implementation didn't end there, since it was also hybridised into the Sega TeraDrive, a Japanese home computer. Meanwhile, the Western equivalent was the Amstrad Mega PC. Then there was the portable Nomad, and the Mega Jet, which was used by Japan Airlines. And the above doesn't even take into account the many bootleg clones about!

viewed by the industry itself as the weaker of the two. Retro Gamer spoke with Mr. Nagumo, the "Team Manager of SOJ CS Product PR", and asked many, many questions, few of them answered. When asked if, due to the impossible odds stacked against them, Sega had considered becoming a developer for either the Famicom or PC Engine, his answer was blunt. "No, we didn't."

Even so, Sega staff were curious about the Famicom. In two separate interviews (GameWeek and TNL) Yuji Naka admitted to making Famicom games run on the MD. His comments, amalgamated, were, "Oh my. [laughs] How do you people know about that one? Well yeah, actually I did. I once made a Famicom emulator for the Mega Drive. It was something fun to amuse myself with at the time. I couldn't play every game with it. But it was fun to call people over and show them Mario running around on a Mega Drive."

Origins Of Genesis

Sega's main source of profit during the Eighties was its hugely popular arcade games, like Yu Suzuki's *Space Harrier* and *Hang On*. To beat the competition the head of Sega, Hayao Nakayama, decided to create the first true arcade home system. He worked in secret with Hideki Sato, modifying Sega's System-16 hardware – the same hardware that powered arcade versions of *Shinobi* and *Altered Beast*. This would have allowed superior visuals and audio, leagues ahead of the competition. It would also allow for easier, more accurate arcade ports (which gamers would be familiar with), and therefore plenty of games.

The new console had to be scaled down from the System-16, in terms of processor speed and available on-screen colours, but Hideki Sato planned ahead and included some extras. It was backwards-compatible with the Master System (using the Power Base Converter), and it was also designed with the future potential to use a mouse, keyboard, 2-inch floppy disk drive, modem, graphics tablet, and printer. He even considered the possibility of someday attaching a CD drive.

Beep!, a multiformat Japanese mag, first announced the system in June 1988 alongside an early prototype drawing, tentatively calling it the Sega Mark V (following on from previous names). The internal project meanwhile was called Mk-1601, but Sega wanted something stronger for the launch. It went through 300 different proposals, before finally settling on Mega Drive.

Disappointingly the Japanese launch was very understated. Their penchant for lengthy, mind-boggling queuing in Akihabara had been forgotten; there were no such queues for the MD! Supply and publicity had been well organised, but the machine was overshadowed by *Super Mario Bros 3*, released just one week earlier. Luckily magazines

» Most Mega Jets being sold come from an initial shipment hijacked by Indonesian sea-pirates. Their distribution was organised by underground collectors.

» A young Hideki Sato working on a prototype Mega Drive; he was the main designer behind it.

» Above and below: By using the Power Base Converter, the Mega Drive could play Sega's back-catalogue of Master System games.

» There are countless unlicensed Chinese (and Korean) games, like *Barver Battle Saga – The Space Fighter*. It was renamed *Final Fantasy* when translated into Russian.

like Famitsu and Beep! gave it positive coverage, and so a small but loyal following began. Reportedly 400,000 units were shipped in the first year.

Despite the low uptake in Japan, Sega went on to pursue highly risky and quite odd endeavours – bad for profits, great for collectors. Along with a gaming modem (see box-out), Sega created an online banking system for Nagoya Bank. The result was the Mega Anser (sic), complete with modem, numerical keypad, and grossly overpriced 'Mega Printer'. Sega also adapted the MD for arcade use, despite it already being based on the System-16 architecture. The results were the System C-2 board, and also the timed MegaTech and then MegaPlay systems; roughly, these three had a combined total of 80 games developed. Japan also received the rarest version of *Tetris* ever, and some sublime exclusive RPGs like *Rent-A-Hero* and *King Colossus* (both fan-translated).

But Japan was never what the Mega Drive was about. Success lay in the USA and Europe. Sega had the fight of its life ahead, and it would take not only gutsy determination to succeed, but also a damned excellent roster of games, and luck. Sega clearly had just enough of these, since it nearly conquered the industry.

Globally Gamed

To bolster the inside information available to Retro Gamer, Ken Horowitz of Sega-16.com kindly donated interviews he conducted with industry figures. One such individual was Michael Katz, former head of Sega's American branch, who presided over the Genesis' initial sales year. Katz explained the early days. "I arrived one month after Genesis launched. The company was small (under 50 people). They had gone through 2-3 Presidents (Gene Lipkin, Bruce Lowery) in the "Master System" days. Dave Rosen – Vice Chairman of Sega (and original founder), was overseeing the running of the company. I reported to him and Nakayama in Japan. Sega was basically a distribution company in the US. Hardware and software development came from Japan. I initially had to deal with keeping employees happy, determining the quality of the staff and getting into the job of building the Sega vs Nintendo juggernaut." Arriving after the American launch, Katz wasn't aware of the details surrounding the name change from Mega Drive to Genesis. Consensus states it was due to a trademark dispute. The facts are blurred, but point possibly to a US manufacturer of storage devices called Mega Drive Systems Inc.

We also questioned Katz ourselves, and he revealed a fascinating anecdote from before the Genesis launch. "I will tell you that Atari was offered the Genesis (when I was President of Atari Games Division) and Jack Tramiel turned it down. It would have gotten Atari back in the game with a 16-Bit system. I attended the meeting at Atari, when Dave Rosen (Sega Chairman) visited us (Jack and I) and made the offer. Jack thought the deal was too expensive, and he was more interested in the Atari ST computer project." The system filtering into America and Europe raises an important question for importers. Why the deplorable need for regional lockout? Katz admitted he had no control over it in America, "Lockout decisions were made in Japan. The Sega Japan International VP handled international sales and marketing." Never knowing when to quit, Retro Gamer pushed Japan's PR man into a corner until he commented. As Nagumo puts it, "We implemented the security regionally to prevent game software being imported due to gaps of sales time between regions." As he wipes the sweat from his brow, we jovially comment that thankfully it wasn't successful. Enterprising young hackers soon bypassed the security with special contraptions, and later, easy methods for modifying the hardware were devised.

» The rarest most expensive version of *Tetris*. Ever. You need underground contacts and plenty of money to join this elite 'ovvners club'.

"IF FORCED TO SUMMARISE WHY THE MD IS SUCH A BLOODY FANTASTIC SLAB OF BLACK PLASTIC, IT'S BECAUSE IT'S ALL THINGS TO ALL GAMERS"

SEGA'S 16-BIT HIT

"IT WAS A SYSTEM WHERE THE ALLURE WAS BORN NOT ONLY OF THE HARDWARE AND GAMES, BUT THE MAGAZINES, PLAYGROUND ARGUMENTS, CLIMATE, AND POLITICS OF THE TIME"

Channel Control

The Mega Drive has so many unusual anecdotes you need a hundred box-outs like this. With the announcement of downloadable MD games for Wii, we're highlighting the revolutionary Sega Channel.

Speaking with Nagumo-san again, we hoped for a pride filled statement that championed this pioneering achievement. His answer was somewhat subdued, "It was a cable television service in the US from which videogames could be downloaded. We started the service in cooperation with Telecommunications, Inc. One could play his favourite games as much as he liked at a fixed amount every month. We also had the same services in cooperation with regional cable televisions in Japan."

From 1993 games were made available for download (divided by genre), at a cost of $12.95 per month. Games were rotated every few weeks, encompassing nearly the entire library, plus a few unreleased titles and imports! They could be played indefinitely, but lasted only while the system was turned on.

Underground importing certainly didn't harm international sales. The MD is officially Sega's highest selling system. International figures are estimated to be between 30 and 35 million units, of which only 10% is attributed to Japan. Sega was determined to achieve those higher sales abroad; it demanded the American branch chant the Japanese word "HYAKUMANDAI" (that's "one-million" in English), in order to encourage sales. Katz elaborated, "The 'one million units' chant was representative of a goal set by Sega Japan. Did they just pluck the number out of thin air? I don't know. I think they thought that if we sold a million units in the first year that would make a big statement. They disregarded Nintendo's position and the fact that all key retailers would have to come on board immediately to hit the number, and also the need for a substantial software library from the get-go." Despite the daily chanting, sales only reached halfway. Katz went on, "We sold about 500K units — which I considered damn good — because Genesis was new, didn't have a large software library initially, and the Nintendo franchise was hard to crack."

In America it seemed Nintendo was unstoppable, and that was indeed its intention. It used some very unorthodox methods to maintain superiority. Stores were bullied into not carrying Sega products, and developers were forced to sign strict licensing agreements stating they'd only develop for Nintendo. But everyone loves seeing a tyrant deposed and a colossus fall, and so various developers began thinking of the Mega Drive as a serious, more profitable alternative. Popular companies like Namco changed allegiance, while EA reverse-engineered the system before developing high quality exclusives. This all helped make Sega a tempting alternative for consumers.

But as Katz explained, Sega wasn't too pleased with EA. "Sega was unhappy about EA reverse-engineering Genesis. We were in the process of giving EA/Trip a 'sweetheart' deal, then we needed a *Joe Montana* game in a hurry (the game being developed for us by Media Genic was way behind schedule), so I asked Trip for a back up *Madden* football game. He gave us one and that assured him a low/royalty free deal on Genesis software. The first *Montana* game being a '*Madden* back up' from EA is a little known fact."

The MD's huge success, of course, came with the arrival of *Sonic The Hedgehog*, a phenomenal mascot that endures to this day. But the question that has to be pondered is what if *Sonic* had not been a hit and never had the success that it did? When asked, Nagumo playfully hinted at the possibility that Sega had other titles, besides *Sonic*, with which to take on Nintendo and *Mario*. "We had the marketing and promotion strategies using various titles at that time. *Sonic* was one of them that led to a big hit." Katz saw things differently. When asked about SOA's initial dislike of the Sonic character, "I certainly underestimated the potential of *Sonic*. Thank God there was good and sustained gameplay (critical in any game success). I know that I thought it was nuts, when we were going for targeted and widespread awareness in everything we did, for the Japanese to develop a game based on a type of character — a hedgehog — that no kid in the American 6-16 year-old demographic would have any familiarity with. We knew we needed a great "character action" game to put in the line up. We were hoping for a *Donkey Kong* type hit. When *Sonic* was so hot, it was decided to bundle it with Genesis (just as ColecoVision was bundled with *Donkey Kong* in 1981). If Sega didn't have *Sonic*, Genesis sales would probably have been less, but it's hard to say. I don't know if Sega Japan had a back up – I think not. Sega Japan was responsible for developing the character action genre. We were responsible in the US for developing sports games."

Despite his great effort and the success he achieved in those early years, Katz was replaced by Tom Kalinske in 1990. Most agree that any successes were a result of combined team efforts, but that Katz is often unfairly overlooked in favour of his successor. In past interviews, Kalinske explained how *Sonic* became the pack-in title. "After my first month as CEO, I told Mr. Nakayama, 'You have to get rid of *Altered Beast*, the title that's bundled with Genesis. It sounds like devil worship. We have to get the price down to $149, and we have to develop more American software.' The board spoke for two

» With an unprecedented comic book styling, *Comix Zone* was one of many exclusive titles for the system that made the Mega Drive worth owning.

» Japan's "Hyper Exciting Visual Game Magazine – Mega Drive Fan" was one of several dedicated publications

» **Top and bottom:** The anime influenced *Phantasy Star* series reached its peak with number 4. Few RPGs even come close to such magnificence.

» **Above and below:** Smooth like liquid napalm, *Ranger X* by Gau Entertainment is a frenetic blaster, with audio and visuals that'd melt the brain of those unaccustomed to it.

hours in Japanese and I was just sitting there, not understanding a word. Finally Mr. Nakayama said, 'No one here agrees with anything you've said.' I thought mine was going to be the shortest career in the business. But as I was walking out, he said, 'But I hired you to make the decisions for Europe and the Americas, so go ahead and do it.'"

Sega eventually annihilated the TurboGrafx 16, and it was doing well against the NES, but the sleeping giant had awakened, and in 1990 Nintendo launched the SNES. The ultimate grudge match began, which even today, remains fresh in peoples' hearts and minds. Nintendo had on its side Japanese stalwarts Square and Enix, which made Sega's conquest of Japan nigh-on impossible, but it had already proven itself to be hip and cool in the West, and this is where it succeeded. Sega was out earlier, priced cheaply, and provided both what people wanted, and what its rivals weren't supplying.

Everyone deep down knew the MD couldn't outperform the SNES; it was the underdog in terms of graphical and audio power (it had a faster processor though). Developers had to work harder to get great results. This extra effort, and dare it be said, love, that went into the games, was very apparent – when they came up wth a graphical trick, or something unique, it showed. The Genesis had more mature software and was also advertised on adult TV like *Saturday Night Live*, further cementing its reputation as "doing what Nintendon't." But the big tipping of scales was *Mortal Kombat*. Sega's version had blood and included all arcade fatalities; Nintendo's version didn't. The atmosphere at the time was electric, and *Mortal Kombat* was a deciding factor for many people's purchases.

By 1992 Sega had 55% control of the market (up from around 8%), and by 1993 it had more than quadrupled its net worth (up to $3.6 billion). Sega had reached its peak. But over the coming years it became like a leper, withering as its valuable bits fell off. The golden era ended, but if you look with the right kind of eyes, you can almost see the high water mark, where that glorious wave broke, and finally rolled back.

If forced to summarise why the MD is such a bloody fantastic slab of black plastic, it's because it's all things to all gamers. It appealed to hardcore elitist collectors, since it was great to import for. Plenty of action games (like *Alien Soldier*, and the explosively magnificent *Ranger X*), with sturdy boxes protecting beautiful Japanese cover-art. When SNES-owning friends had updates of Konami classics like *Contra* and *Castlevania*, MD owners were blessed with their own exclusive updates. They were no mere ports, but were designed from scratch, taking into account the hardware's limitations. And they were all the better because of this. There was no relying on vast colours or a custom Sony music chip; the gameplay had to be strong.

Importantly, it tapped in the mass market and appealed to families with low incomes. In impoverished areas in the USA it was popular among Black and Hispanic youths, who enjoyed the affordable easy-to-play arcade thrills provided. Children were also catered for, with both licensed and new IPs (*Quackshot* and *Toejam & Earl*). When the kids were tranquilised and asleep in bed, parents could indulge in a plethora of sports titles (*Madden* etc), violent brawlers (*Cyborg Justice*), or cerebral games like *Ecco*.

It was a system where much of the atmosphere and allure was born not only of the hardware and games, but the magazines, playground arguments, climate, and politics of the time. One of the most notable American magazines covering the system was GameFan, which, despite being multiformat, loved the Genesis. Its founder, Dave Halverson, understood, appreciated, and helped generate a lot buzz for Treasure too. GameFan praised their games, rightfully hyped up *Gunstar Heroes* to encourage sales, and were one of the very first English language magazines to conduct an interview with Treasure. Of course, not every multiformat magazine had quite the same views, which is why Edge infamously only gave *Gunstar Heroes* a half-page 6 out of 10 review. If you were an MD fan back in the early 1990s, Halverson's GameFan was the magazine you wanted to be reading!

We've not even yet mentioned subjects like the VR headset, Menacer Gun, Activator peripheral, *Virtua Racing*'s 3D graphics, pirate flash carts, Brazilian rock band Megadriver, Boris Vallejo, or the million-and-one related subjects. But it doesn't matter. Experiencing the system will tell you more than these words ever could.

» **Top and bottom:** *El Viento* and *Alisia Dragoon* are two very similar, very fun, and very Japanesey action-platformers.

» **Top and bottom**: Konami knew how to love Mega Drive owners: Insane hyper-exaggerated action in *Contra*, and classic vampire hunting in *Castlevania*.

» Every kid wants to rip his best friend's spine out. The uncensored Sega version shifted the tides between MD and SNES popularity.

» There was certainly no shortage of exclusive, epic, and utterly essential action-RPGs: *Beyond Oasis* (1), *Soleil* (2), and *Landstalker* (3) are all must-haves!

PERFECT TEN GAMES

It's practically impossible to sum up the Mega Drive's best games as there were so many classics to choose from. If you are new to the machine, then these are some of the most important titles that you should consider adding to your collection

01

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2

- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** SONIC TEAM
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

01 **After the success of the original *Sonic The Hedgehog*, it came as no surprise to see the lovable scamp returning a year later in a brand new adventure.** With a refined engine, the addition of Miles "Tails" Prowler, a greatly enhanced bonus stage and an excellent two-player mode, *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* is easily one of the hedgehog's most memorable 16-bit outings. While the core gameplay is little different to that seen in the original, Sonic Team threw in plenty of new touches to ensure that gamers wouldn't feel short-changed. The end result is not only one of the Mega Drive's greatest platformers, but quite possibly the hedgehog's finest hours on any system.

GUNSTAR HEROES

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** TREASURE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** DYNAMITE HEADDY

02 **Outrageously good platformer/shooter that features dazzling graphics, a crazy relentless pace and dozens of fantastic boss encounters.** Created by a bunch of ex Konami staffers (you should all know the story by now) *Gunstar Heroes* does tricks with the Mega Drive's hardware that many thought impossible, and even today it has a freshness that belies its 13-year-old roots. While special mention must obviously go to the game's astounding visuals, Treasure also ensured that the gameplay was just as special and injected all manner of interesting play mechanics to ensure that every level remains as fresh as a proverbial daisy. If you're after a frenetic blaster then look no further. This is run-and-gun heaven.

02

DEVIL CRASH

- **RELEASED:** 1991
- **PUBLISHED BY:** TECHNO SOFT
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** THUNDER FORCE III

03 **There's a few pinball games on Sega's Mega Drive but this superb 1991 offering from Techno Soft remains a firm favourite.** While it only features one main table, it's well designed and boasts all manner of different bonuses that lead you to several smaller, mini-tables. While Techno Soft's previous pinball title *Alien Crush* featured an alien theme, *Devil Crash* has chortling knights, chanting monks and dragons occupying its tables. Released in the UK as *Dragon's Fury, Devil Crash* is a superb pinball game that should last you forever. Oh, and it's got one of the most rocking soundtracks we've ever heard.

STREETS OF RAGE 2

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** STREETS OF RAGE

04 **As with *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*, Sega took everything that made the original *Streets Of Rage* so fun to play and turned it up to 11.** The visuals have had an overhaul with all the heroes and enemies being beefed up and boasting greatly improved detail. Yuzo Koshiro is back with another thumping soundtrack and the game's many bosses are tougher than ever. Each character now has a selection of special moves and there are four different protagonists to choose from: Axel and Blaze from the original game and new boys Skate and Max. A magnificent scrolling fighter that's crying out for a next-gen remake.

STRIDER

- **RELEASED:** 1991
- **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** AFTER BURNER

05 **Oh come on, did you really think we'd do a Mega Drive top ten and not feature *Strider*?** Despite our obsessive love for Capcom's purple clad ninja (it's a long sad story) *Strider*'s addition is easily justified, as it's quite simply the strongest arcade port on Sega's 16-bit console. Not only does it capture all the character of the coin-op classic, it goes one step further and delivers a stunning soundtrack that actually manages to improve on the arcade original. Sure there's a fair amount of flickering here and there but as far as capturing the essence of the original game goes no other Mega Drive conversion comes close. Essential.

03

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DESERT STRIKE: RETURN TO THE GULF

- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **PUBLISHED BY:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** JUNGLE STRIKE

06 **Set a year after the events in the Gulf War, *Desert Strike* sees you climbing into an Apache and using it to stop a despot in the Middle East from starting World War III.** Utilising an isometric viewpoint, EA's blaster saw you storming into armed bases to rescue POWs, whilst using your firepower to take out anything that stood in your way. Despite the destruction you can cause, *Desert Strike* is quite a cerebral affair, with many of the later levels requiring a fair amount of strategy to complete. The thinking man's shoot-'em-up.

SHINOBI III: RETURN OF THE NINJA MASTER

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** THE REVENGE OF SHINOBI

07 **Despite a lengthy development period, *Shinobi III*'s four-year wait was worth it.** Not only has the pace been increased, your ninja now knows a selection of new skills. Flying-kicks, a running dash and using your hands to swing across ceilings are just a few of the new abilities you can use and all have been perfectly integrated into the game. There are even sections where you can ride horses or surf along the crest of a wave, dispensing bad guys as you go. If only the later games showed a tenth of the imagination of *Shinobi III*…

ECCO THE DOLPHIN

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** NOVOTRADE INTERNATIONAL
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** JAWS UNLEASHED

08 **Delightful underwater adventure that sees you trying to rescue your dolphin friends when they all get sucked up by a mysterious hurricane.** With its focus on exploring the expansive stages and its many devious puzzles, *Ecco The Dolphin* was quite unlike any other game at the time and instantly caught the public's attention. The underwater environments are full of detail and bursting with all sorts of exotic undersea creatures. Our only real complaints with *Ecco* is that some of the sections can be difficult to negotiate, ruining the otherwise tranquil atmosphere.

09

THUNDER FORCE IV

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** TECHNO SOFT
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** ALIEN CRUSH

09 **While *Thunder Force III* was never released in the UK, Sega atoned by releasing its superb sequel in 1993.** Techno Soft's fourth *Thunder Force* title (and the third to appear on the Mega Drive) boasted amazing visuals, over-the-top weaponry and a stunning soundtrack that perfectly complemented the frenetic on-screen action. As with *Thunder Force III*, the first four levels could be approached in any order, but the stages themselves were far larger in scope and featured both vertical and horizontal sections. Throw in some insanely tough bosses, plenty of exotic locations and those stunning visuals and you have one of the Mega Drive's classiest shooters.

SHINING FORCE II

- **RELEASED:** 1994
- **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SHINING FORCE

10 **While it essentially features the same combat system and gameplay mechanics as the original *Shining Force*, Sega's sequel is generally considered by many to be a far superior RPG.** Take the combat for example: it's a lot quicker now, making fights far less of a chore than before, and the new counter-attacks add a great degree of spice to the proceedings. The interaction of items is also better integrated with little touches like automatically passing a picked up item to another character when your main hero's pockets are full, and being able to view an item's stats before you buy them means that everything flows along rather nicely. A superb RPG that shouldn't be missed under any circumstances.

10

MEGA DRIVE

and the rest...

Sega's 16-bit Mega Drive is easily its greatest triumph and boasts a huge catalogue of fantastic games across a wide variety of genres. Don't believe us? Here's the proof

01 MICHAEL JACKSON'S MOONWALKER
02 BUBSY THE BOBCAT
03 FANTASIA
04 SPACE HARRIER II
05 KLAX
06 ROAD RASH
07 AQUATIC GAMES
08 NSECTOR X
09 RAMBO III
10 CHAKAN THE FOREVER MAN
11 RISTAR
12 GHOSTBUSTERS
13 STRIDER
14 FLICKY
15 DJ BOY
16 VIRTUAL BART
17 ALTERED BEAST
18 GHOULS 'N GHOSTS
19 TETRIS
20 NHL HOCKEY 92
21 DARK CASTLE
22 PAC-MANIA
23 LETHAL ENFORCERS
24 SONIC THE HEDGEHOG
25 STEEL EMPIRE
26 LEMMINGS
27 WARDNER
28 KID CHAMELEON
29 MORTAL KOMBAT II
30 STREETS OF RAGE II
31 HELLFIRE
32 BATTLETOADS
33 FORGOTTEN WORLDS
34 SPLATTERHOUSE 3
35 MEGAMAN: THE WILEY WARS
36 EARNEST EVANS
37 SHADOW DANCER
38 FANTASTIC DIZZY
39 MERCS
40 THE TERMINATOR
41 PGA TOUR GOLF
42 AEROBLASTERS
43 ROCKET KNIGHT ADVENTURES
44 TOY STORY
45 THE GADGET TWINS
46 REVENGE OF SHINOBI
47 MICRO MACHINES 96
48 TOEJAM & EARL
49 JAMES POND
50 RAINBOW ISLANDS
51 AFTER BURNER
52 CASTLE OF ILLUSION
53 FIFA INTERNATIONAL SOCCER
54 STREETS OF RAGE
55 TURBO OUTRUN
56 GAIN GROUND
57 PHANTASY STAR IV
58 GOLDEN AXE
59 CANNON FODDER
60 ECCO THE DOLPHIN
61 FLASHBACK
62 ALADDIN
63 TRUXTON
64 COLUMNS
65 WORLD OF ILLUSION
66 SPEEDBALL 2
67 THE JUNGLE BOOK
68 WONDERBOY III
69 THUNDER FORCE III
70 AIR DIVER
71 ULTIMATE QIX
72 DEVIL CRASH
73 BATMAN
74 DECAP ATTACK
75 GYNOUG
76 URBAN STRIKE
77 OUTRUN
78 RED ZONE
79 ALIEN 3
80 GAUNTLET IV: THE FINAL ENCOUNTER
81 SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2
82 THE IMMORTAL
83 NBA JAM
84 QUACKSHOT
85 GUNSTAR HEROES
86 CASTLEVANIA: THE NEXT GENERATION
87 THUNDER FORCE IV

05
KLAX

06
PLAYER 2
BIKE
VIPER

07

08
SCORE
3400
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30000

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500

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1P
560
TOP
100000

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SCORE
18600
ROUND

20

21
LIFE

22

23
1P 000118
CREDIT
02
2P 000

24
SCORE
TIME
RINGS

FIGHT !!

30

31

32
ARSON

33

38

39
SCORE
32600
TIME
188
LIFE

40

41
Wind
12mph

42
10200

47

48

49
45
2
4
0002320

50
SCORE
HIGH SCORE

51
SCORE
HI

56
EXIT

57
This is your first job since
you joined the Hunters Guild.

58
STAGE
MAGIC

59

60

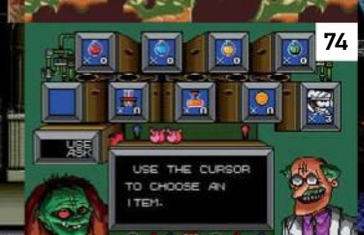
65

66

67
7420

68
3950

69
TOP
SCORE


74
USE THE CURSOR
TO CHOOSE AN
ITEM.

75

76

77
TIME
SCORE
00292210
STAGE

78
Rocket

83

84

85

86

87
TWIN SHOT

MEG

MANY GAMERS ASSOCIATE THE NAME 'MEGA-CD' WITH 'ABJECT FAILURE', BUT OTHERS BELIEVE THE PLATFORM'S ONLY FAILING WAS TO BRING CD-ROM TECHNOLOGY TO THE PARTY A GENERATION TOO SOON. WE CELEBRATE A TIME WHEN SEGA WASN'T AFRAID TO TAKE MASSIVE RISKS IN THE HARDWARE ARENA

INSTANT EXPERT

- **Some later Mega** CD games were coded to make use of the additional power of the ill-fated 32X add-on – when fully assembled, this hardware setup was quite a beast and required three different power supplies.
- **The Mega-CD** was also able to play the CD-G+, a format used mainly to display karaoke lyrics on screen – a karaoke add-on was also produced for the system.
- **Digital Picture's** *Sewer Shark* and *Night Trap* were going to be released on the Super Nintendo CD-ROM system – when this was cancelled, a deal was signed to bring them to Mega-CD.
- **All Mega-CD** games carry a region lockout system. This can be circumvented by chipping the machine or purchasing a converter cartridge (such as Datel's CDX) that slots into the Mega Drive's cartridge port.
- **The Ricoh RF5C164** sound chip is one of the machine's greatest assets and grants an additional eight channels of sound, all of which can be used to play samples.
- **Game saves were** recorded to the Mega CD's internal RAM; it was also possible to purchase a RAM cartridge that would offer even more space. Some games – such as *Shining Force* CD – required so much memory to save a game that these carts were almost essential.
- **The Mega Drive** and Mega-CD both feature the same 16-bit Motorola 68000 CPU, but the one present in the Mega-CD has a clock speed almost twice as fast.
- **Notable 'pack-in' games** included *Road Avenger*, *Sol-Feace*, *Cobra Command* and *Sega Arcade Classics*, which featured several popular Mega Drive games such as *Golden Axe* and *Revenge Of Shinobi*.
- **Titles such as** *Ernest Evans* and *Sol-Feace* were later released on the Mega Drive, with only the CD audio and cut-scenes missing.
- **Rapper-turned-thespian** Mark Wahlberg can count himself as a Mega-CD star – he appeared in *Marky Mark: Make My Video*, which allowed players to edit three of the Funky Bunch's songs.

They say that pride comes before a fall but as the first broadsides of the 16-bit war were unleashed at the dawn of the Nineties, Sega certainly had plenty to feel proud about. The launch of the Mega Drive (rebranded 'Genesis' in the US) had transformed the company from plucky also-ran to industry leader virtually overnight; the hitherto unchallenged dominance of Nintendo's 8-bit NES was broken and by the time 1992 arrived Sega was able to call 50 per cent of the American home console market its own.

It was during this exciting period in Sega's history that Scot Bayless joined the company. He vividly remembers what it was like to work for Sega at its peak: "It was exhilarating; we were running about 50 per cent on sheer bravado. One of the great things about Sega in those days was the company's willingness to just try stuff. We had a T-shirt made with the slogan 'This may not work, but what the hell' – that was pretty much our attitude." Such joyous ebullience imbued Sega with the confidence to experiment with new technology – and in this case, it was the medium of CD-ROM that intrigued the Japanese firm.

Coming straight from Spectrum Holobyte (where he worked on the epic air combat flight simulator *Falcon 3.0*) Bayless took the position of Technical Director at Sega of America and was ultimately put in charge of overseeing the US debut of Sega's latest piece of hardware – the Mega-CD. It wasn't the first company to embrace the possibilities of the shiny plastic disc – rival NEC had produced its own CD-ROM add-on for the 8-bit PC Engine in 1988 – but with the Sega brand in the ascendancy and the war between the Mega Drive and Nintendo's SNES about to go global, all eyes were on this latest system and the new era of technological brilliance it was about to usher in. "Sega of Japan was already well along the road and the first development kits showed up not long after I did," reveals Bayless. "My first responsibility was to help get the first demos ready for the big announcement event in New York."

The machine had been conceived by Sega's top hardware team in Japan, but so fearful was the company of internal leaks that it had been intentionally slow to provide Sega of America with vital technical information relating to the project. This clandestine attitude meant that Bayless and his team had to work overtime to get things ready for the US launch, which was scheduled for 1992. "At that point there were virtually no software tools – only barely functional dev kits and incomplete documents that were being translated more slowly than they were being revised," he remembers. "There was one stretch where I spent four continuous days in the building – as in didn't actually leave the premises. I lived off vending machines and coffee while I slogged through a bunch of systems code, trying to get the demos to function reliably."

Because the hardware development was being done exclusively by Sega's Japanese team, Bayless decided early on that it was vital that he familiarise himself with the new machine. "One of the first things I did was to go to Tokyo and get up to speed on the hardware," he recalls. With the relevant tools in place, Bayless and his US team were able to start tinkering around with the console, and it didn't take long for potential problems to arise. "The big headline was that there was a second CPU with its own memory – that was the good news," he says. "The bad news was that the data path between

Year released: Japan: 1991 USA: 1992 UK: 1993

Original price: Japan: 49,800 Yen USA: $300 UK: £270

Buy it now for: £30+ ($50+)

Associated magazines: *Megatech, Mean Machines Sega, Sega Power, Sega Pro, Mega*

Why the Mega-CD was great…
For many gamers it was their first glimpse of the raw potential offered by the CD-ROM format, and while it wasn't the success that Sega might have hoped for, you can't deny that the Mega-CD was privy to some wonderful games. Plus the 'Mark 1' Mega Drive and Mega-CD combi is one of the sexiest hardware setups in the history of consoles – fact.

A-CD

16-BIT
POWER
ON
OFF
POWER
RESET
MEGA DRIVE
SEGA
CONTROL 1
CONTROL 2
MEGA-CD
SEGA
READY
COMPACT
disc
ACCESS
CD ACCESS
CD IN
CD OUT
STAND-BY MODE

COMMUNITY MEGA-CD SITES TO WATCH

PAL Sega Mega-CD Library
http://www.sega-mega-cd-library.co.uk

If you're thinking of collecting every single PAL Mega-CD release then this site is an essential resource. It contains an exhaustive collection of Mega-CD info, including details about games that never made it and how to emulate the Mega-CD on your PC.

Eidolons Inn
http://www.eidolons-inn.net/tiki-index.php?page=SegaBase

Although it's not specifically aimed at covering the Mega-CD, SegaBase is one of the longest running Sega resources on the net and is home to an excellent piece on the history of the Mega-CD.

Sega-16.com
http://www.sega-16.com/

Another long-running Sega fan site, Sega-16 is incredibly professional and a joy to navigate. It houses loads of Mega-CD reviews as well as some intriguing features regarding Sega's history. It's all too easy to get hopelessly lost in this excellent site.

Sega Memories
http://sega-memories.blogspot.com/

If your rose-tinted specs have a pronounced 'blue' hue to them then this site will float your boat. Again, it's not expressly aimed at covering the Mega-CD but the sheer volume of Sega nostalgia is guaranteed to strike a cord with fans of the machine.

the Mega Drive and the Mega-CD was very limited. What really stood out was the machine's ability to store (for that time) ridiculous amounts of data; the real challenge was figuring out what to do with all that storage. Given the tools of the time, the human cost of building that much content was prohibitive, so people started looking at other possibilities. Probably the most promising element of the hardware was the sound system; it hugely enhanced the sound capabilities of the system of the Mega Drive. But, short of just playing back Red Book audio, nothing really interesting got done with that lovely hardware."

Of course, Bayless couldn't go public with his concerns; Nintendo was gearing up for the launch of the Super Nintendo and as a result Sega was putting a lot of effort into making the Mega-CD a success. However, even when he tried to talk up the power of the console, it didn't always work out as expected. Take the infamous 'Blast Processing' boast, for example. "Sadly I have to take responsibility for that ghastly phrase," admits Bayless with a grimace. "One of our programmers called Marty Franz discovered that you could do this nifty trick by hooking the scan line interrupt and firing off a Direct Memory Access at just the right time. The result was that you could effectively jam data onto the graphics chip while the scan line was being drawn – which meant you could drive the Digital-to-Analogue Converters with 8 bits per pixel. Assuming you could get the timing just right, you could effectively draw 256 colour static images. There were all kinds of subtleties to the timing and the trick didn't work reliably on all iterations of the hardware, but you could do it and it was cool as heck. So during the run-up to the Western launch of Mega-CD the PR guys interviewed me about what made the platform interesting from a technical standpoint and somewhere in there I mentioned the fact that you could just 'blast data into the DACs'. They loved the word 'blast' and the next thing I knew 'Blast Processing' was born."

Tinkering around with new technology was undeniably fun but not having any input into the actual development of the machine was frustrating for Bayless and his team at Sega of America. However, as fate would have it, they were able to pitch in with critical assistance from time to time. "There was one technical issue that we did a pretty good job of coping with before it got onto consumers' radar," remembers Bayless. "The CD drive Sega of Japan chose was, predictably, an inexpensive single speed consumer CD drive. What nobody stopped to think about was how that drive would get used by those early FMV games. I got this frantic call one day from the Quality Assurance guys; they were using retail Mega-CDs – the same ones queuing up to be sold to consumers – for final QA, and they were suddenly experiencing an insane hardware failure rate. Units were burning up in droves; in fact, a few of them had literally caught fire as they died. We were in the big push toward launch and the whole place was in a panic because QA was out of hardware on which to test games. It was like an episode of *House*; the patient was doomed but nobody could figure out why. About all we knew was that the systems started flaming out when the FMV-based titles were being tested by QA. All of those games used some form of multi-stream video technique, which meant they were constantly seeking the read head in the drive. What

» *Sonic CD* was easily the Mega-CD's most sucessful platformer. It's still superb fun.

finally tipped me off was an obscure manufacturer's specification for the CD drive; it was rated for a five per cent duty cycle – which means that they were expecting that no more than five per cent of the time would the drive be seeking from one track to another. It was built for people who wanted to play music CDs and, of course, you rarely seek between tracks more than once every few minutes, so five per cent was way more than they'd ever expected people to need. What nobody anticipated was a multi-stream FMV videogame seeking 75 per cent of the time – or more. We were literally cooking the motors that moved the heads." Bayless had identified the problem in the nick of time and ultimately saved Sega from suffering a potentially catastrophic PR blunder.

Despite these setbacks, the allure of CD-ROM technology – coupled with Sega's recently elevated status within the videogame industry – meant that hype for the Mega-CD grew exponentially as the launch drew ever closer. As a result, Bayless found himself receiving phone calls from somewhat unexpected quarters. "I remember I was sitting in my office one day tinkering with some low level code when the phone rang," he recalls. "This sexy female voice said, 'Is this Scot Bayless?' I said, 'Yes,' and she replied, 'This is David Bowie's office. Can you please hold?' It turned out it was Bowie's manager, a very cool guy named Bob Goodale. Bowie was completely jazzed about the potential of Mega-CD as a window for music into games." The artist formerly known as The Thin White Duke wasn't the only musician to take interest in the aural capabilities of the Sega's new baby. "I had the bizarre meeting with Michael Jackson around the same time," Bayless remembers. "He'd already signed the *Moonwalker* deal with Sega and they were touring him around the Redwood City studio. I spent about half an hour showing him all kinds of techie stuff we were doing and not once did he ever comment or even make eye contact; he just kind of stood there with about 15 of his minions hovering around him. When we finished there we walked him over to the sound studio, which was just down the hall. Suddenly there was this new person in the room; it was uncanny. Jackson came to life like someone had flipped a switch. It was obvious that the only thing he was excited about was the music."

The Japanese launch of the Mega-CD took place in December 1991. Units flew off the shelves despite the high retail price of ¥49,800, but the relatively small installed base of the Mega Drive in that region meant that sales soon dipped. Sega knew that the US launch was far more important, given the strength of the Genesis. It took place almost a year later (with the machine being re-christened 'Sega-CD') and although the public was ravenous for this new add-on, production issues meant that a paltry 50,000 units were made available to American retailers. Like Japan, the price was bordering on the prohibitive but Sega's lofty standing Stateside helped the company quickly sell through what limited stock it had; by the time 1992 drew to a close, 200,000 units had found their way into US gamers' homes. Likewise, 60,000 of the 70,000 machines made available for the UK release the following spring were snapped up before August. It was a positive start, but it wasn't to last.

> **"A few units had caught fire as they died"**
> SCOT BAYLESS ON INITIAL PROBLEMS

With the Super NES and Genesis/Mega Drive locked in deadly combat, Sega of America decided to brandish the Mega-CD as a unique weapon in the

» SIMS' *Vay* was picked up for Western release by Working Designs but failed to make the same impact as *Lunar*. It was given a new lease of life on Apple's iPhone.

VERSIONS SOME OF THE BEST

Mega CD MK II

Introduced in order to bring down costs, the Mk II model is smaller than the original and lacks the motorised CD tray and function lights. It's also a lot less sexy than the previous model, but in its favour it takes up less room and is more reliable.

Wondermega

JVC decided it wanted a bite of the Mega-CD cherry and produced this sleek, all-in-one unit. MIDI and karaoke options were included and the hybrid console was even released Stateside as the X'Eye, although sales were disappointing.

Multi-Mega

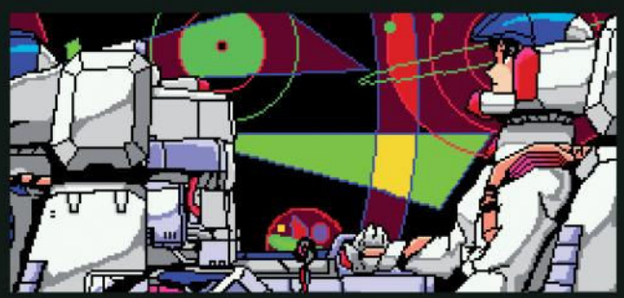
The Multi-Mega was little bigger than a portable CD player (it could even be used as such and was powered by two AA batteries for audio playback) but the price was bordering on the insane – UK gamers were expected to shell out £500 for it.

Aiwa CSD-GM1

Perhaps the rarest of all the Mega-CD systems, this Mega Drive/Mega-CD combo looks very much like a traditional boom box. It was produced in limited numbers and only saw distribution in Asia, and as a result it is almost impossible to track down these days.

» Renamed the CDX in the US, the Multi-Mega fused the Mega Drive and Mega-CD into one package – but at £500 in the UK, the pricing was way off.

» Sega focused on promoting the machine's unique FMV-based games, but people soon realised that this gaming revolution was a false dawn of epic proportions.



» *Jurassic Park CD* was a massive undertaking for Sega's newly-founded multimedia studio, but with Scot Bayless's guidance, it was pretty decent.

fight against rival Nintendo. A dedicated multimedia studio was established within the company's Californian headquarters at great expense in order to produce top-quality content with which to fill the Mega-CD's shiny discs. "It was a pretty cool place and Sega was willing to invest a lot of money in making it a showpiece," explains Bayless. "The art team was buying SGI Indigo work stations for about $50K per seat, including a copy of SoftImage, and the sound studio was a showcase of sparkly new technology. It was impressive."

> **"Could Guitar Hero have gone on Mega-CD? Hell yes"** SCOT BAYLESS

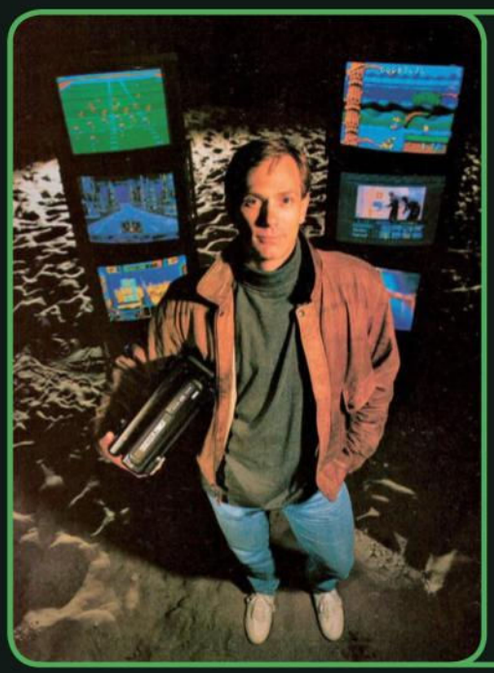
The first project assigned to this new studio couldn't have been any more high profile; Sega had secured the *Jurassic Park* licence and was keen to produce a game that demonstrated the Hollywood aspirations of the Mega-CD technology. "The *Jurassic Park* project was a huge priority for Sega, mainly because the association with Steven Spielberg was seen as so important to the PR campaign," recalls Bayless. "Every resource you can imagine was made available. Kathy Kennedy, producer on the film and one of Steven's longest standing collaborators, went way out of her way to help Sega. She opened doors to everything from Phil Tippet's early stop-motion dinosaur studies to concept art from Stan Winston's team to the CG models used for the film. I remember one day this package arrived from Amblin with a cassette tape inside; the only thing on the tape was take after take of Wayne Knight gurgling out his death rattles from the scene with the Dilophosaurs – they really did give us everything." Despite this intense focus, the project endured a torrid development period. "Fast forward about six months and I get this phone call at about 2am from our studio head in Tokyo, who was meeting with the Sega of Japan execs," explains Bayless. "He said, 'I just showed Hayao Nakayama [Sega's CEO at the time] a build of *Jurassic Park*. As of right now, you're in charge of the project. Do whatever you have to do to get it back on the rails.' So I rolled up my sleeves, fired some people and eventually shipped a pretty decent game."

As *Jurassic Park* proves, the advent of CD-ROM technology brought with it amazing potential, but there were less welcome side-effects, too. "*Jurassic Park* represented the transition from the small budgets and tiny teams of the old days to something much more expensive and demanding of real production discipline," says Bayless. "When you're building a game that has to fit into a few megabytes of ROM, it's not inconceivable that you can keep the whole project in your head. But when you're making something that requires a dozen CG animators, casting calls,

location shoots, ADR and Foley sessions, you can't afford to do anything without a plan. I remember that before I took over the *Jurassic Park* project, a team went romping off to Hawaii where they hired a steadicam and spent a week running around in the jungle taking hours of video of palm trees whizzing by. If you look at the finished game, maybe a total of two minutes of that footage survived the project. The rest was worthless, but it cost maybe $20K to get it."

Cash continued to be poured into Mega-CD development and for a time hardware sales were encouraging, but by this point Nintendo had stepped up its game and the SNES was rapidly asserting itself in the West. The once insatiable public interest in Sega's CD-based machine began to wane and the previously 'innovative' tech began to appear stale. This process was aided by the fact that one of the console's key selling points – FMV-based gaming – was something of a non-starter. "Sega got way too focused on FMV," admits Bayless. "There was all this talk going around about games converging with movies and Mega-CD being the gateway to that convergence. Suddenly game guys were thinking of themselves as movie makers. But if you really looked at how that translated into an entertainment experience it didn't take a rocket scientist to realise that the things Mega-CD could do well really had very little to do with movies." As the Nineties progressed, rival CD-ROM-based consoles emerged; while they could hardly be classed as tremendous successes themselves, the arrival of the CD-i and 3DO essentially made the Mega-CD technically obsolete. The failure of the machine was followed by the abortive 32X project ("I was present at the inception of 32X and it was literally designed on a cocktail napkin," reveals Bayless with a laugh) and Sega's previously soaring reputation was left in tatters. To say that Sega's slide began with the release of the Mega-CD is probably doing the machine an injustice, but the high-profile collapse of the format certainly didn't help the company's public image.

It's all too easy to be overly negative when looking back on the Mega-CD, but it's often forgotten that the platform boasted some truly brilliant games. Sega's conversion of Capcom's *Final Fight* was a definite highlight, offering all three characters and a two-player mode (both famously absent from the SNES port), and Working Designs localised Japanese RPGs such as *Lunar: The Silver Star*, *Lunar: Eternal Blue* and *Vay*, making themselves heroes with English-speaking Sega fans in the process. But what does Bayless consider to be the best titles for the system? "For polished gameplay, *Sonic CD*, hands down. For the best soundtrack, *Ecco CD*. For the best use of the platform, I'd have to go with Kojima's *Snatcher*."



LIFE'S A BEACH

Bayless may have been instrumental 'behind the scenes' at Sega of America but thanks to a famous American magazine advert, he also became the visible 'face' of the Mega-CD to many gamers. He was featured on a double-page spread where he extolled the virtues of Sega's latest system, and the promotion was printed in leading US magazines such as *GamePro* and *EGM*. "That shot was taken on Stinson Beach just north of San Francisco," recalls Bayless when questioned about his brush with superstardom. "The agency had hired some very high profile photographer to do the shoot and his vision was to put that wall of TVs in front of the setting sun with me in the foreground. So there we were, on the beach with him on a ladder and the two of us surrounded by a herd of people and gear. The agency guys are there sitting in director's chairs like directors on a movie set. They're moving stuff around, restacking the TVs, testing low angles, testing high angles. They're facing the sun. They're facing away from the sun. They're sending people into the city to buy me clothes because the photographer wants to try out new outfits – I changed about six times during the course of the afternoon with people holding up blankets while I stripped. At the end, the only thing I was wearing that was actually mine was my shoes. Meanwhile, there are all these people walking by on the beach asking if I'm someone famous and, of course, while all this is going on the sun is going down. Finally, they start shooting at like 7pm, but by then the sun was gone. So when it's all done you have a shot they could have done on a sound stage with a couple of buckets full of sand. But hey, for about seven hours I got to be a movie star!"

Plenty of theories have emerged as to why the Mega-CD failed to make a significant impact on the world of videogames; it's been argued that the price was too high, the inability to function without a Mega Drive limited its sales potential and the technology involved simply wasn't powerful enough to convince people to upgrade. Bayless has his own verdict. "What turned out to be problematic was the content," he explains. "Personally I don't think the platform ever really demonstrated successfully what the value proposition was. A few years later Sony very successfully positioned the PS2 as a competitively priced DVD player that also happened to offer a great gaming experience. The Mega-CD might have been able to play a similar gambit but that was never part of the plan. However, there was a deeper issue; it was fundamentally a solution in search of a problem. I remember sitting in lengthy head-scratching sessions – not just at Sega of America but at Sega of Japan as well – where we were saying to each other, 'Great, so now we have a storage system that's 100 times bigger than before. So what?' Worse still, access to all that data was 100 times *slower*. It was a fundamental paradigm shift with almost no thought given to consequences. I honestly don't think anyone at Sega asked the most important question: 'Why?' There's a rule I developed during my time as an engineer in the military aviation business: never fall in love with your tech. I think that's where Mega-CD went off the rails. The whole company fell in love with the idea without ever really asking how it would affect the games you made."

» *Night Trap* went on to become something of a 'video nasty' and sparked an age rating classification scandal upon its release in the US and Europe.

When asked what could have been done to improve the Mega-CD's chances, Bayless recounts an interesting anecdote that is made all the more ironic given the game industry's current preoccupation with music games. "Record producer Todd Rundgren showed up at the studio one day, pitching something that was like the pre-biotic version of *Guitar Hero*," recalls Bayless. "He wasn't all the way there but he was poking in the right direction. Sadly we were all too caught up in our own skewed vision to really understand him or what could have been done with his embryonic ideas. Could *Guitar Hero* have been done on Mega-CD? Hell yes. Would that have transformed the business and saved Mega-CD? Who knows, but I bet it would have made a splash."

MEGA-CD

PERFECT TEN GAMES

It's easy to laugh at Sega's Mega-CD, but to do so would be rather foolish. Despite it's poor sales and the numerous problems Sega faced while making it, plenty of great games were available for the system. The following examples are the very best, representing a wide range of different genres that still hold up today

01

SONIC CD

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2

01 **Every console needs** a killer app to justify its existence, and *Sonic CD* is as close as you're going to get on the Mega-CD. Regularly cited as one of the best games in the series, this ambitious title made good use of the CD format's storage potential by including gigantic levels, Mode 7 bonus stages and a spectacular soundtrack. The game was made even deeper by the fact it was possible to time-travel forwards and backwards on each level, essentially making the stages three times as big. Interestingly, the US version features a completely different soundtrack to the Japanese and European variants – although both selections of songs are equally fantastic.

FINAL FIGHT CD

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** SEGA/CAPCOM
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SPIDER-MAN VS. THE KINGPIN

02 **When *Final Fight*** (unquestionably the quintessential arcade hit of the late Eighties) was ported to Nintendo's Super Famicom in 1990, you could practically hear the cries of despair emanating from Sega fans the world over. For a time it seemed as if this Capcom classic would remain exclusive to Nintendo, but thankfully Sega was granted permission to reprogram the game when the Mega-CD came along – it produced what is arguably the best home console conversion (aside from recent emulated ports). *Final Fight CD* is packed with all three characters and all the levels. Needless to say, the previously smug SNES owners were left feeling a little put out.

02

SHINING FORCE CD

- **RELEASED:** 1994
- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** SONIC SOFTWARE PLANNING
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SHINING FORCE GAIDEN (GAME GEAR)

03 **The only *Shining Force*** game to make its way onto the Mega-CD is a combined remake of the Game Gear releases *Shining Force Gaiden* and *Shining Force Gaiden 2: Sword Of Hajya*. Visually it's not what you could call a massive improvement when compared to the Mega Drive instalments, but the sheer scope of the challenge is almost overwhelming. So epic was the quest that the Mega-CD internal save game RAM wasn't enough to contain all the data; the purchase of a separate RAM cart was essential if you wanted to see everything the game had to offer.

LUNAR: THE SILVER STAR

- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **PUBLISHER:** WORKING DESIGNS (US)
- **CREATED BY:** GAME ARTS/STUDIO ALEX
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SILPHEED

04 **Game Art's epic** RPG was the closest the Mega-CD ever got to having its own *Final Fantasy*, and following its Japanese release, the console's sales in that region were given a boost. Although the in-game graphics were hardly ground-breaking, they were accompanied by some lush anime sequences and an astounding soundtrack by Noriyuki Iwadare. US firm Working Designs picked *Lunar* up for Western localisation and did a fantastic job – the company later returned to the game when it was remade for the PSone in 1996.

THUNDERHAWK

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHER:** CORE DESIGN
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** CHUCK ROCK

05 **UK-based Core** Design was a staunch Sega supporter and produced some of the Mega-CD's finest moments. While games such as *Battlecorps* and *BC Racers* pushed the hardware but fell a little short on enjoyment, *Thunderhawk* was a complete success in both regards. Smooth Mode 7 rotation and scaling was coupled effectively with some of the most frantic action ever witnessed on the format, and the game was rightly praised by the press upon release. A 32-bit sequel followed that added full 3D visuals, but the original remains the one we're most fond of.

03

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SPECIAL THANKS TO GENERATION-MSX.NL FOR ADDITIONAL SCREENS

06

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LUNAR: ETERNAL BLUE

- **RELEASED:** 1994
- **PUBLISHER:** WORKING DESIGNS (US)
- **CREATED BY:** GAME ARTS/STUDIO ALEX
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** TENKA FUBU

06 **Although it doesn't** attract as much praise as its predecessor, *Lunar: Eternal Blue* is just as enjoyable an RPG experience as *The Silver Star*. Also, despite featuring a new cast of protagonists, the gameplay remains largely unchanged. Again, Working Designs took the plunge and brought this Stateside with a great translation. In both Japan and the US, this was one of the final high-profile pieces of software for the ailing platform; by the time of the American launch the system was all but dead.

POPFUL MAIL

- **RELEASED:** 1994
- **PUBLISHER:** WORKING DESIGNS (US)
- **CREATED BY:** FALCOM
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** YS

07 **Originally produced for** the NEC PC-8801 in 1991, this 2D action RPG title shares many similarities with the *Wonderboy: Monster World* series. The player takes on the role of a bounty hunter named Mail, but it's possible to switch to other characters. With the excellent English translation and voice work, the Western version of *Popful Mail* is arguably the best of all the conversions and carries a justifiably inflated price tag when it appears on auction sites today. While we're not fans of unscrupulous game resellers, *Popful Mail* is unquestionably worth paying through the nose for.

ROBO ALESTE

- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **PUBLISHER:** TENGEN
- **CREATED BY:** COMPILE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SHADOWRUN

08 **A spiritual sequel** to the shockingly brilliant Mega Drive shooter *MUSHA Aleste*, *Robo Aleste* featured the same fixation with large mecha as its predecessor, but was unique because it placed these mechanical killing machines in feudal Japan. Although the gameplay doesn't really present any ideas that couldn't have been achieved on the good old Mega Drive, the music and cut-scenes genuinely elevate the game to a new level of greatness. The game saw release in all three key territories and is in high demand thanks to its overall quality.

09

SNATCHER

- **RELEASED:** 1994
- **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** LETHAL ENFORCERS

09 **It's ironic that** while many developers wrestled in vain with grainy, low quality FMV to create the ultimate interactive movie, *Metal Gear* creator Hideo Kojima succeeded where others had failed – by using traditional hand-drawn 2D visuals. Showcasing a plot that owes more than little debt to the likes of Hollywood movies such as *Blade Runner* and *The Terminator*, *Snatcher* remains one of Kojima's most beloved works. It was also released on the PC Engine CD-ROM, PlayStation and Saturn, but the Mega-CD outing remains the only version to be officially translated into English. This makes it a highly sought-after title. You need this game, but your bank balance won't thank you.

KEIO FLYING SQUADRON

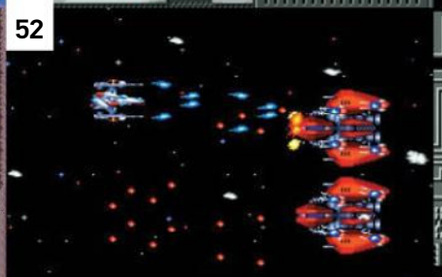
- **RELEASED:** 1994
- **PUBLISHER:** JVC/VICTOR
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** FUNKY HORROR BAND

10 **The Mega Drive** and Mega-CD were never gifted with a conversion of Konami's deliriously playable *Parodius*, but JVC's *Keio Flying Squadron* is a perfectly acceptable substitute. Putting the player in the high-heeled shoes of a girl dressed in what looks like a Playboy bunny outfit, *Keio* boasts a similar style of horizontally scrolling wackiness and puts the Mega-CD hardware to good use to produce some excellent cut-scenes and a brilliant CD-quality soundtrack. A Saturn sequel followed in 1996 that added 2D platforming sections, but for pure shooting brilliance the Mega-CD original is where it's at. A relatively late release, the PAL version of *Keio* is common and reasonably priced.

10

MEGA-CD and the rest...

FMV flop or 16-bit wonder? Regardless of your viewpoint Sega's Mega-CD still has plenty of games that are worth seeking out. Here are some of the best and worst



01 SAMURAI SHODOWN
02 ECCO THE DOLPHIN: THE TIDES OF TIME
03 BRUTAL: PAWS OF FURY
04 HEART OF THE ALIEN
05 MORTAL KOMBAT
06 SPACE ACE
07 AFTER BURNER III
08 EARTHWORM JIM: SPECIAL EDITION
09 FLASHBACK: THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY
10 PRINCE OF PERSIA
11 SEWER SHARK
12 EYE OF THE BEHOLDER
13 THE ADVENTURES OF WILLY BEAMISH
14 LETHAL ENFORCERS
15 ROAD AVENGER
16 JAGUAR XJ220
17 BATMAN RETURNS
18 COBRA COMMAND
19 HEIMDALL
20 PITFALL: THE MAYAN ADVENTURE
21 SHADOW OF THE BEAST II
22 IRON HELIX
23 CHUCK ROCK
24 THE NINJA WARRIORS
25 WILD WOODY
26 BLACK HOLE ASSAULT
27 DOUBLE SWITCH
28 FATAL FURY SPECIAL
29 FIFA INTERNATIONAL SOCCER
30 MICROCOSM
31 SILPHEED
32 HOOK
33 GROUND ZERO TEXAS
34 TOMCAT ALLEY
35 NIGHT TRAP
36 BC RACERS
37 CRIME PATROL
38 JURASSIC PARK
39 NBA JAM
40 BATTLECORPS
41 RACING ACES
42 SENSIBLE SOCCER
43 WINDS OF THUNDER
44 ETERNAL CHAMPIONS
45 CITIZEN X
46 WHO SHOT JOHNNY ROCK?
47 STAR WARS: REBEL ASSAULT
48 DUNGEON MASTER II: SKULLKEEP
49 MAD DOG MCCREE
50 THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND
51 DARK WIZARD
52 SOL-FEACE
53 THE LAWNMOWER MAN
54 WOLFCHILD
55 BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA
56 SOULSTAR

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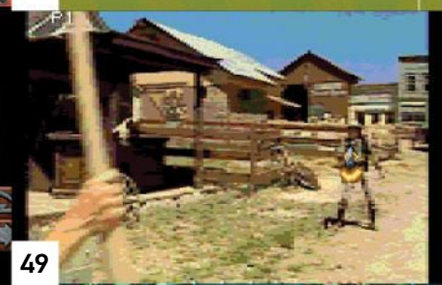

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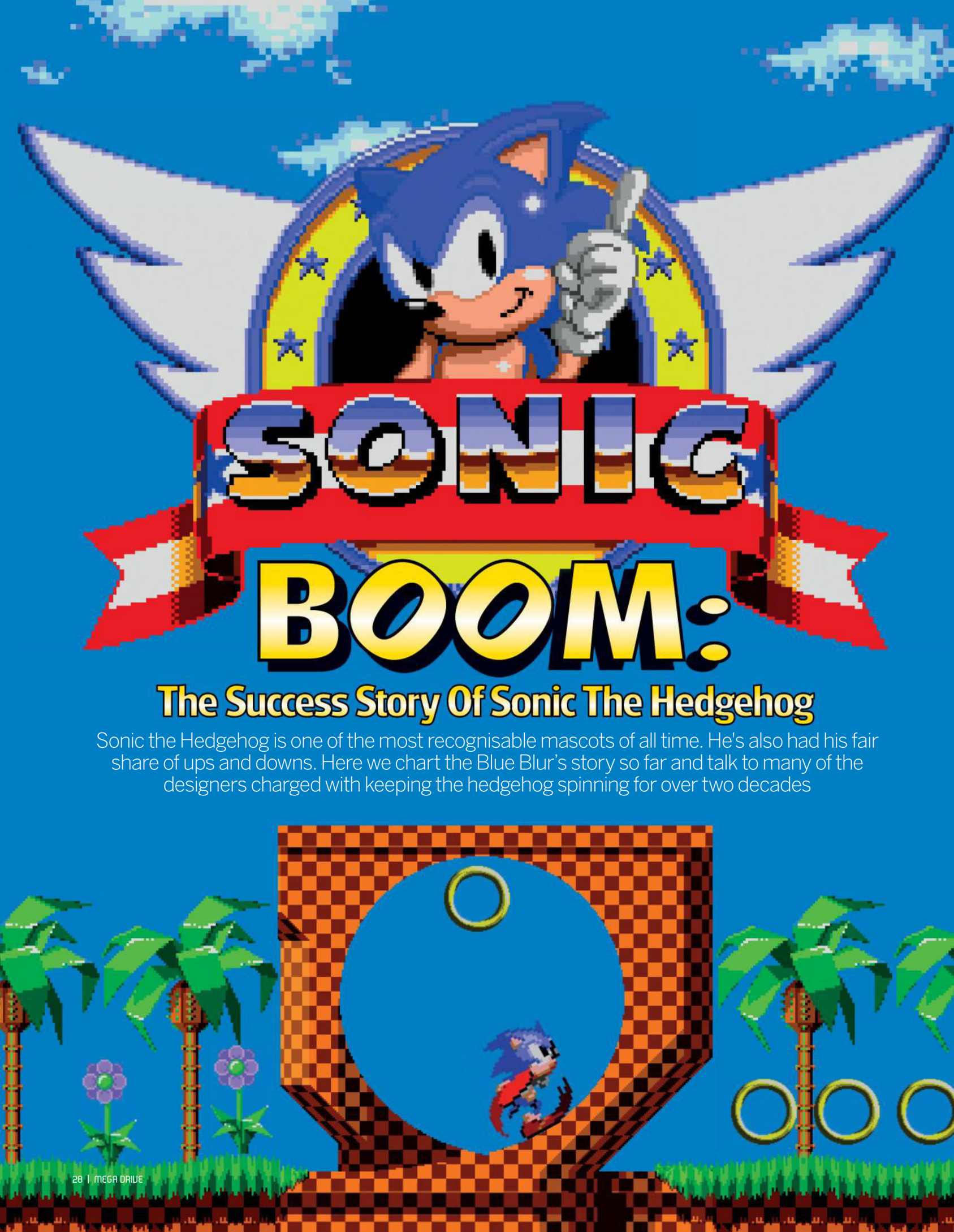


The Success Story Of Sonic The Hedgehog

Sonic the Hedgehog is one of the most recognisable mascots of all time. He's also had his fair share of ups and downs. Here we chart the Blue Blur's story so far and talk to many of the designers charged with keeping the hedgehog spinning for over two decades

Is it possible to write a history of Sonic without mentioning Mario? In theory, but you'd be foolish to try. Though created a decade later, Sonic's existence hinges on that of Mario, and the two have been rivals ever since. Sonic's history is therefore also Mario's, and even platform games as a whole.

The sheer brilliance of *Super Mario Bros* put a Nintendo Entertainment System into more than 60 million homes worldwide, while Sega's 8-bit equivalent, the Master System, had to make do with just 13 million. There are several reasons for this disparity, of course, but Mario was one of the biggest reasons and Sega knew it. Launching its 16-bit system, the Mega Drive, in 1988, Sega had a two-year head start on the Super Famicom/SNES, but even with such an advantage it struggled to keep up with the ageing NES.

Sega's expertise, right through the Eighties and beyond, focused on its coin-op games. This was where Sega ruled videogames, its comfort zone, and the company certainly managed to attract a sizeable fan base just by being able to convert its greatest hits to the home. But the tastes of console gamers gradually shifted throughout the mid to late Eighties. NES games like *Super Mario Bros*, *The Legend Of Zelda*, *Mega Man*, *Castlevania* and *Final Fantasy* represented a shift away from the instant gratification of the arcades and towards a more protracted experience that gamers could spend hours, days and weeks absorbed in.

Sega remained extremely successful in the arcades, of course, so its home conversions also remained a core part of its business, especially since they were relatively cheap to produce and sold in large enough numbers. But the Master System and Mega Drive needed original games, unconnected to the coin-ops. These came slowly but surely. Games like *Phantasy Star* and *Streets Of Rage* were great console exclusives that represented a step in the right direction, and Sega even published some wonderful platform games in the shape of *Psycho Fox* and *Alex Kidd*, but these did little to slow *Mario*'s astronomical rise in popularity. By 1990 there had been four incredible *Mario* platform games, each one somehow more ingenious than the last, to the point where for many people Mario and videogames were one and the same thing. Sega still needed its Mario.

Perhaps it's a sign of how things had changed by the Nineties, or maybe it shows just how different Sega and Nintendo really were, but Sonic's origins were actually very different to those of Mario. The latter was famously created out of necessity. The limitations of 1981's visual technology meant that it was difficult to even create a character that could be recognised as a person, so Mario became a short, fat plumber with a moustache not because Shigeru Miyamoto had any urge to tell a story about a man in dungarees but because that was all the technology would allow. By 1991, however, technology had progressed to the point where just about any character could be represented on screen, so instead of creating a character out of blocks on graph paper with a particular type of game in mind, Sega simply started with paper and the desire to make a character of any kind.

"Everything about Sonic The Hedgehog was designed to make the game play quickly, keep momentum up, keep moving at top speed"

In what is now a part of the company's legend, Sega set several of its best designers to work, challenging them to create a new character that could become a new type of hero for Sega and a true rival to Mario. Several characters were created as a result of this exercise, many of which were used in later games, but the winner was a little blue hedgehog, drawn by Naoto Oshima, one of the designers on the first two *Phantasy Star* games.

Originally named Mr Needlemouse, Oshima's hedgehog was coloured the same blue as the Sega logo, which only seemed appropriate since the character was designed to be the company's new mascot. Designed primarily to appeal to an American audience, he also featured the colours white and red, though Oshima puts this down to coincidence, citing Santa Claus's colour scheme and the belt across Michael Jackson's jacket on the cover to *Bad* as the inspiration for Sonic's shoes. Finally, Oshima wanted to imbue his character with a 'can do' attitude, inspired by television footage of the then Arkansas governor Bill Clinton. In the original design, Sonic also had fangs and played in a rock band, but these elements were removed under the advice of Sega America's Madeline Schroeder.

Sonic's friendly but cool character design was certainly effective, but nobody ever played *Super Mario Bros* because they liked the character. At least we hope they didn't. Sonic needed the best kind of platform game, and he got one from Yuji

Developer Quotes

"I have great memories of *Sonic*. In fact, it provided a ton of inspiration for a game Team17 developed in the early Nineties (*Superfrog*) and I guess a host of others too. The speed of the game, along with great vibrant art was a real head-turner at the time. It's a powerful series that's had a rollercoaster ride the last few years but I would like to hope it's getting back to where it was. I much prefer the 2D playfields."

Martyn Brown, co-founder of Team 17

Developer Quotes

"I remember seeing *Sonic* at an early trade show in the US. It was January 1991 at CES Las Vegas. It was a single level and fairly low profile on Sega's booth – just one or two discreet screens. The Genesis had been launched in the US six months before.

"Six months later at the summer CES in Chicago, Sega went into overdrive promoting *Sonic*. It stole the show. Back then all videogames were slow, so this was revolutionary and eye-catching! Sega set out to use *Sonic* to demonstrate the speed of their new console, and they pulled it off fantastically!"

Phillip Oliver, CEO & co-founder of Blitz Games Studios

Must-Have Merchandise

There's been an unquantifiable amount of Sonic merchandise produced in the past 20 years. Here's our pick of some of the most interesting examples

1. BOARD GAME

MB Games licensed tons of videogame properties for its board game business in the Eighties and Nineties. The *Sonic* one is typical of the line, vaguely translating the videogame experience into a fun but uncomplicated board game.

2. STYLUS

Released as a pre-order incentive for DS RPG *Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood*, this collection of three styluses allows you to decorate your DS with Sonic, Knuckles and… uh… someone we don't recognise.

3. SONIC RACING SYSTEM

Being focused on speed, Sonic has appeared in a bunch of racing games, both video and physical. This one is a lot like Scalextric, only with a hedgehog and a fox instead of cars.

4. PAPERCRAFT

Created by Sega to celebrate Sonic's 15th anniversary in 2006, this model re-creates Green Hill Zone in colourful, papery style. Get it from: **sonic.sega.jp/SonicChannel/enjoy/papercraft/index.html**

5. CONFUSING BACKPACK

You might have a hard time finding this bootleg backpack out in the wild but it's sure worth the effort. Just look at how many confusing, incongruous elements it packs into a single item.

Naka and Hirokazu Yasuhara, Sega programmer and game designer respectively, who joined with Oshima to form Sonic Team and develop *Sonic The Hedgehog*.

Yuji Naka was practically legendary at Sega for his incredible programming ability, and his influence over *Sonic The Hedgehog* cannot be overstated. Naka was a great fan of *Super Mario Bros* but wanted to play something much faster, so that was the direction that the project went in. Everything about it was designed to make the game play quickly – quite ironic given the slow speed of hedgehogs. There are the loop-the-loops and the springs, all good for keeping momentum up, and the gameplay flowing from left to right, while Sonic's ability to curl into a spiky ball mid-jump allowed him to hit an enemy, eliminate it, and then keep moving at top speed.

The resulting game was pure Sega. Almost blinding in its use of colour, thrilling to play and totally unwilling to take itself too seriously, it was a true pleasure that effortlessly appealed to anyone who tried it and had a very likeable character as its star. Tyler Sigman, lead designer on 2006's *Sonic Rivals*, recalls: "I played the original *Sonic* on Genesis when I was a teenager, and like most people, I loved it! The speed, graphics and character were great. Like *Mario* and *Mega Man*, *Sonic* was really memorable platforming. It seems such a small thing now, but Sonic's attitude really did stand out from a lot of other characters at the time," he says, citing the way Sonic would impatiently tap his feet when left alone as an example of the hedgehog's cool factor.

Christian Senn, director of the cancelled *Sonic X-Treme*, is also a fan of Sonic's famous attitude but takes the time to praise the exciting, kinetic gameplay of the original game. "I liked Sonic's look, his attitude, and the way it felt to zoom around the playfields," he says. "I liked the look and functionality of the enemies, the fact

Sonic Timeline

A quick guide to Sonic's most memorable games… and a few others

Sonic The Hedgehog

Multi | 1991

One year after the competition to find a Sega figurehead, Sonic's first outing was unveiled. Created by Yuji Naka, *Sonic The Hedgehog*'s mixture of speed and graphical finesse helped to establish the Mega Drive as a serious contender in the hearts of gamers the world over.

Sonic The Hedgehog 2

Multi | 1992

This time, players found themselves immersed in a game that had been improved in every conceivable way. It was also the first console game to have a worldwide launch when Tuesday 24 November 1992 became known as '*Sonic 2*'s Day'. Geddit?

SEGASonic The Hedgehog

Arcade | 1993

With the home market stitched up, Sega decided to try its hand in the arcades. Trackballs at the ready and two new characters to play with failed to inspire much interest. Poor distribution and the fact that the game deviated from the normal gameplay didn't help either.

Sonic CD

Mega-CD | 1993

New hardware meant that there really was only one character to sell it to the masses. Basically, this was *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* with a time travel element. For what it's worth, the game did try to make use of the CD-ROM, with much-improved animation and sound.

Sonic Chaos

Game Gear | 1993

Handheld gamers rejoiced at the knowledge that Sonic was back on the Game Gear. This time you could play through the game as Tails, who had been absent from previous Game Gear outings, as the game revealed more fully what the handheld was capable of.

"Following directly behind Sonic at all times, Tails' ginger blur added a nice visual flourish to the game's colourful rollercoaster ride"

that they provided some challenge and offered a break from the rush of speed. I think what I enjoyed most of all about the game was the balance between puzzles, speed, combat and collection. The physics and feeling of interaction really felt great."

The game and its star became synonymous with Sega and helped propel the Mega Drive to sales of around 40 million, only 9 million short of the SNES – a minuscule gap compared to the 47 million that separated the Master System and NES. *Sonic The Hedgehog* was so popular that it inevitably became a huge brand for Sega, starting, of course, with sequels. Four such sequels followed on the Mega Drive and Mega-CD alone, not to mention all the spin-off games and Master System and Game Gear exclusives that also appeared in the same period. Aside from some tiny proportional changes, Sonic's appearance remained the same in the sequels. And why wouldn't it? Sega pretty much got the design spot-on from the beginning. Plus, the company's artists probably had their hands busy designing the multitude of new characters that the publisher somehow seemed to think were so necessary.

Tails wasn't so bad, admittedly. In fact, his inclusion in *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* is one of the single most underrated features of the series. Following directly behind Sonic at all times, his ginger blur added a nice visual flourish to the game's colourful rollercoaster ride. And then there's the fact that a second player could plug in their own pad and take control of Tails, happily jumping around behind Sonic and helping out with enemies, but without the risk of failure. It's the sort of feature that games all too rarely employ, allowing a younger or less skilled player to join in and have fun without any frustration, and it's something that the *Mario* series has only recently begun to experiment with in *Super Mario Galaxy*'s co-star mode.

Sadly the same can't be said for the other characters introduced through *Sonic*'s early years. The likes of Knuckles and Amy Rose signified the start of a worrying trend toward unnecessary, annoying new characters that would only get worse as the years went by. Though the early to mid Nineties certainly has its fair share of terrible sidekicks. Anyone remember Mighty the Armadillo, Espio the Chameleon or – ahem – Nack the Weasel? No, thought not. Despite the invasion of the world's most annoying characters, *Sonic 2* and *3*, *Sonic & Knuckles* and *Sonic CD* all proved to be brilliant platform games and all played their part in catapulting Sega's little blue hedgehog into popular culture as a whole. Countless merchandise tie-ins

» *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* introduced Tails, who was fine on his own but started a worrying trend.

Developer Quotes

"Like a *Super Mario* game on steroids, *Sonic* was a wonderwall of hyperkinetic play for the ADHD generation. The feeling was supersonic... sans gin and tonic!"

Eugene Jarvis, creator of Robotron: 2084 and Defender

Sonic Spinball
Multi | 1993
As popular as Sonic was, *Sonic Spinball* was an attempt to cash in yet further on the blue speedy one. Once again, deviating from what gamers expected proved its undoing, and the fact that this was a deeply average game didn't help matters.

Sonic Drift
Game Gear | 1994
What Game Gear fans needed was a *Mario Kart* game, or so Sega decided. A *Mario Kart*-style racer would have been ideal. However, what Japanese gamers got was a slow, dull and uninspired racing game that was never released outside Japan, thankfully.

Sonic The Hedgehog 3
Mega Drive | 1994
A return to form for Sonic with this very impressive outing that not only looked beautiful but also added a greater depth of gameplay than had been seen previously. Of special note is that this is the first *Sonic* game to feature a save feature, thanks to the built-in battery.

Sonic & Knuckles
Mega Drive | 1994
Picking up where *Sonic 3* left off, this is more of the same great gameplay lifted from its predecessor. However, thanks to the use of Sega's lock-on technology, further gaming bonuses could be attained by simply connecting the cart to other *Sonic* games. Genius.

Sonic Triple Trouble
Game Gear | 1994
After a glut of ill-conceived Game Gear outings, the ickle Sonic was back on form and back to doing what he and Tails did best – collecting rings, emeralds and racing through bonus stages. As Game Gear *Sonic* games go, this was mightily impressive.

followed, including a total of four different animated TV series, a movie and enough comic books to destroy an entire rainforest. And there were more games too, Sonic proving so popular that Sega felt it could drop him into any old game to boost sales. Which, to be honest, it was right about. Throughout the early Nineties, *Sonic* characters starred in a *Puyo Puyo* clone, a pinball game, two kart racers and a couple of isometric platformers too, all of them very successful. Sega had clearly got the Mario equivalent it was looking for.

As Sega transitioned from the Mega Drive to the Saturn, it only seemed inevitable that Sonic would make the leap too, but, for a multitude of reasons, it never really happened. He certainly put in his fair share of appearances, though. There was the not really 3D at all *Sonic 3D*, the actually quite brilliant retro compilation *Sonic Jam*, and the technically impressive racing game *Sonic R*. But no proper platform game. Sonic Team chose to spend the Saturn era developing original ideas like *NiGHTS Into Dreams* and *Burning Rangers* instead – for which we're very thankful, of course – while the US-based Sega Technical Institute was charged with developing a full 3D update of the series in the form of *Sonic X-Treme*, which sadly failed to reach completion.

Developer Quotes

"Sega knew they needed a character of their own that could match up with Mario, but that is easier said than done. They set an ambitious goal and managed to pull it off in a compelling and unique way."

Trip Hawkins, founder of Electronic Arts and 3DO

Christian Senn recalls the process of trying to rework the character of Sonic into three dimensions. "I wanted to maintain the look and feel of the 2D Sonic from *Sonic 3* for *Sonic X-Treme*," he says. "In addition to the game graphics, the original sketches of Sonic by Naoto Oshima were wonderful and I was drawn to them as inspiration for *X-Treme*. I discussed a desire to maintain the integrity of the original 2D art style with lead artist Ross Harris, who subsequently did a brilliant job of bringing Sonic to life in 3D. We had not yet seen any representations of Sonic in 3D, so it was very exciting to pave new ground. We wanted to continue the quality and polish that our predecessors had achieved, so attention to the big picture and the details was essential."

Translating the gameplay into 3D was less easy, however, and may be the key to the reason why the troubled *Sonic X-Treme* was never completed. "I desired to take the aforementioned balance of *Sonic The Hedgehog* and translate it into 3D," says Senn. "Not having any idea of how large a bite we were trying to chew, the intention was to combine speed, puzzle-solving, ring-collection, bonus rounds, special rounds, enemies, bosses and some new gameplay elements nobody had every seen before. One of the hallmarks of the successive 2D *Sonic* titles was to introduce something new every game. We were trying to create all of the original elements for the first time in a whole new dimension, and even add more. In hindsight, it might have been wise to attempt to re-create the basic elements of the 2D games in 3D, which might have allowed us time to polish the game before finishing and releasing it."

"The key thing I remember Sega always pushing for was to 'make Sonic move faster'. Getting the feeling of speed was a real challenge"

Jon Burton, founder and director of Traveller's Tales, had more success than Senn, creating and finishing two *Sonic* games, *Sonic 3D* and *Sonic R*, for the Saturn, though neither of them could really be classed as proper *Sonic* platform games. "The key thing I remember Sega always pushing for was to 'make Sonic move faster'," says Burton. "In *Sonic 3D*, getting the feeling of speed was a

» *Sonic 3* was so big and ambitious that it was split in half, with the rest of it going into *Sonic & Knuckles*.

Sonic Timeline

A quick guide to Sonic's most memorable games... and a few others

Sonic Drift 2
Game Gear | 1995
Compared to the original, *Sonic Drift 2* was a much more considered sequel. This time the game delivered a better Grand Prix mode, banked curves, hills and the all-important link-up mode. Not the class act that *Mario Kart* proved to be, but a worthy attempt nonetheless.

Sonic Labyrinth
Game Gear | 1995
Sega continued to treat Game Gear owners to more variants. This time it decided that a puzzle game in the style of *Marble Madness* was the order of the day. However, the time limits and puzzle elements brought down what may have been a half-decent game.

Sonic The Fighters
Arcade | 1996
It had been three years since the last *Sonic* outing at the arcades, so it must have seemed prudent to have another stab at the coin-op fans. Unfortunately, because it was aimed at kids, it lacked depth and ultimately proved to be an unrewarding experience.

Sonic 3D
Multi | 1996
New console, new *Sonic* game. Well, kind of... This was pretty much the same game that would appear on the Mega Drive but with added 3D tunnels. However, at the time it impressed gamers and gave them an indication of what the Saturn was capable of.

Sonic Jam
Saturn | 1997
This had nothing to do with fruit, but from Sega's point of view it wasn't a bad ploy to get some money from Saturn owners who missed out on the Mega Drive games. Aside from the omission of *Sonic CD*, this was the perfect way to enjoy classic *Sonic* action.

Toon Struck

Robby London was head of creative affairs at DIC, the animation studio behind scores of popular children's cartoons between 1980 and 2008, including three different Sonic The Hedgehog series. Here he tells us what it was like to work with Sega's most famous face

Retro Gamer: What was your first experience of *Sonic The Hedgehog* and what did you think?
Robby London: We knew just from its trending popularity at the time that we wanted to pitch Sega of America on the idea of developing *Sonic* into an animated series for television, and so we needed to bone up on the property. Since I am not a gamer, we got one of the DIC artists who was a *Sonic* aficionado to play it for a video capture. So I was introduced to it by watching a video of the game being played. I recall thinking it had a very charismatic lead character and an interesting look. Of course, I couldn't make too much sense of the story elements, but then in those days it was quite typical for the lore behind most games to be elusive and impenetrable.

RG: What instructions did Sega give you in terms of what you could or couldn't do with the character?
RL: I don't remember any specific upfront instructions per se, other than emphasising to us how crucially important and valuable Sonic was to them. Which, of course, we knew! Sega did retain a contractual approval right for everything we did. So when we'd submit something like a character design, they would often have comments or requests for revisions, mostly on specific details of the designs, and mostly to ensure there was conformity across all the *Sonic* products they were licensing. They also had approval rights on all the voices, music, individual scripts for the episodes and various other creative elements. While they gave notes and requested revisions from time to time, I can't remember any specific theme to their comments nor any generic instructions. They had a representative named Jane Thompson who spent a lot of time with us in LA. Because she was professional and knowledgeable about production, that turned out to be exceedingly helpful.

RG: What do you think are the important characteristics of Sonic and how are these captured in a cartoon rather than a game?
RL: Mostly, I think it's attitude. Even Sega's original design of the character conveyed a lot of 'tude; cockiness, perseverance and a sort of a devil-be-damned outlook. Traits such as these lend themselves really well to an animated character for a television cartoon and can be significantly enhanced in that medium. Those of us who were writers created a lore and a context and situations for Sonic to demonstrate this persona with a richness that was not possible in the game. We came up with the phrase 'fastest thing alive', the signature arms-crossed, impatient foot-tapping pose, along with the catchphrase: 'I'm waiiiiting.' We also gave the character an actual voice, in this case Jaleel White, a huge TV star in America at the time for his role as Steve Urkel [in sitcom *Family Matters*]. Writers created the lines and the personality and Jaleel helped bring it to life. And in those days, even the animation itself that was possible in television far surpassed the limitations of videogames of the time.

real challenge. We had an upper limit on how fast we could physically scroll the screen, so Sonic could never move as fast as we wanted him to. Having the boost pads and bumpers helped, but he definitely moved slower in *Sonic 3D* than any other *Sonic* game. In *Sonic R*, the whole point of the game was racing, so the feeling of speed could really be focused on. In that game, the rings were very important as they would open up boost gates and secret short cuts, so the rings were used like a currency to 'buy' short cuts for better lap times."

The Saturn had some incredible games, of course, but if ever a console needed its star attraction it was this one. Up against the spectacularly popular PlayStation, the Saturn really needed every advantage it could get, and particularly after the world-changing brilliance of *Super Mario 64*, everyone expected *Sonic* to make the transition from pixels to polygons in style. It never really happened on the Saturn, but *Sonic* did eventually go 3D in the following generation, and Sega wasted virtually no time getting the game out there, launching *Sonic*

Developer Quotes

"Growing up, I was a hardcore Nintendo fanboy. The Genesis changed all that and made me an overall videogame fan instead of a one-console fanboy, which is a really silly way to be, but that's another article. I loved character platformers, so when *Sonic* came around with that crazy blast processing and insane speeds I was hooked. Loved the look, style and play, and it had a huge influence over my first commercial success – *Jazz Jackrabbit*."

Cliff Bleszinski, creator of Jazz Jackrabbit

Sonic R
Saturn | 1997
A cracking Saturn game and one that succeeded because it offered something different. *Sonic R* was a 3D racer that pitted familiar characters against one another. Oddly enough, this wasn't developed by Sonic Team but rather by British developer Traveller's Tales.

Sonic Adventure
Dreamcast | 1999
After the demise of the Saturn, Sonic returned faster and sleeker than ever. Determined to make the Dreamcast a success, Sonic Team did everything to ensure that *Sonic Adventure* was a big adventure that ably demonstrated the technical proficiency of the new console.

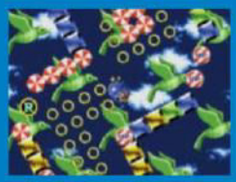
Sonic Pocket Adventure
Neo Geo Pocket Color | 1999
'Anything but the GBC' must have been the cry at Sega when it decided to make another portable edition. Taking elements from *Sonic 2* and *3* as well as bolting on a link-up option where you could race against your friends once again showed the prowess of Sega.

Sonic Shuffle
Dreamcast | 2000
Hot on the heels of *Sonic Adventure* came *Sonic Shuffle*, a collection of puzzle games not unlike *Mario Party*, which must have partly inspired Sega's stab at the genre. It was a fairly dire experience but it was capped off with some lovely cel-shaded graphics.

Sonic Adventure 2
Dreamcast | 2001
By now the Dreamcast was all but gone, but it didn't stop Sonic Team releasing one last *Sonic* game on a Sega console – it was Sonic's tenth anniversary and it would have seemed rude not to. However, this wasn't the last we'd see of the Blue Blur...

The Special Stages

One of the most memorable parts of the early Sonic games are the hidden stages that featured completely different gameplay to the main adventures



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

The original special stage isn't exactly the best, but it is still fun. In it you control a curled-up Sonic as he bounces around a rotating maze, trying to get to the Chaos Emerald in the centre while avoiding the exits. The same special stage also appeared in *Sonic The Hedgehog 4: Episode I*.

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2

Definitely the most popular special stage of them all, this one saw Sonic and Tails running straight down the screen along a half-pipe, collecting rings and avoiding bombs. It was a technical marvel at the time, creating a sense of 3D depth that was rare on the Mega Drive.

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 3

Continuing the trend of 3D bonus stages, *Sonic 3*'s effort asked you to run around a globe and walk over the top of coloured balls in order to change them from blue to red. Hit a red ball, however, and Sonic would bounce off, often straight into trouble. This stage was also in *Sonic & Knuckles*.

SONIC CD

Making great use of the Mega-CD's sprite-scaling abilities, *Sonic CD*'s special stage was basically a 3D open world in which Sonic could run in any direction, in order to hunt down and destroy robots. Another technical marvel, this was just one of many things that made *Sonic CD* special.

SONIC 3D

The Saturn version of *Sonic 3D* featured a special stage that was very similar to *Sonic 2*'s, but the Mega Drive edition was more original, using sprite rotation to create platforms for Sonic to use to reach the end. Though they looked great, these stages suffered from some unfortunate pop-up.

Developer Quotes

"I first saw it when shown to me by a journo mate – same guy who brought me a NES and *Super Mario* one weekend, which really was a life-changing event. I remember being impressed by the bright colours and the speed. It seemed ridiculously fast, especially compared to *Mario*. It was obviously Sega's reply to Mario, attempting to establish a similarly iconic main character with an excellent platform game. I liked that they didn't try simply to ape *Mario*, but distinguished *Sonic* with detailed environments, big areas and the speed. *Sonic 2* remains my favourite, though!"

Jeff Minter, developer of Tempest 2000

Adventure alongside the Dreamcast in America and Europe.

Sonic Adventure was a bold new direction for Sega's mascot, and though far from perfect, it was an interesting update after so many years of anticipation. Sonic Team could have easily settled on a simple 3D interpretation of the classic *Sonic* games but went so much further, incorporating many contemporary ideas such as vast explorable areas in addition to its linear, rollercoaster-like levels. The focus was also broadened far beyond Sonic himself, allowing control of six different characters, all of whom had their own adventure and style of play. A great idea in theory, this proved successful from a game design perspective but didn't exactly make *Sonic Adventure* popular with those who didn't like the series' ever-expanding cast.

"The rise of the Mega Drive days, the big comeback on the Dreamcast followed by a low point and ultimately the modern era's focus on classic values"

Sonic Adventure also divided fans by lending a voice to its characters, almost turning the game into an interactive cartoon. American voice actor Ryan Drummond portrayed Sonic and recalls the loose approach that Sega took towards defining

Sonic Timeline

A quick guide to Sonic's most memorable games... and a few others

Sonic Advance

Game Boy Advance | 2001

Having spurned Nintendo's GBA in favour of less popular handhelds, it was great to see the little fella finally getting the small screen attention he deserved and, best of all, it was an all-new adventure, which drew upon elements from all his previous outings.

Sonic Advance 2

Game Boy Advance | 2002

Having become one of the bestselling GBA titles, it was a pretty safe bet that Sega would ensure that *Sonic* would return. Not only is this a better game than the original GBA outing but it also introduces us to the rather oddly named Cream the Rabbit...

Sonic Battle

Game Boy Advance | 2003

A woefully bad fighting game, *Sonic Battle* tried to cash in on the popularity of Nintendo's *Super Smash Bros* series on a system that wasn't nearly powerful enough to pull off a game of that calibre. This is one *Sonic* spin-off game that's best avoided.

Sonic Pinball Party

Game Boy Advance | 2003

A fun little pinball sim that also happened to feature tables based on other Sega fan favourites *NiGHTS Into Dreams* and *Samba De Amigo*. *Sonic Pinball Party* wasn't quite as clever as the Mega Drive's *Sonic Spinball*, but it was still pretty good fun.

Sonic Heroes

Multi | 2003

Sonic made his cross-platform debut in style with this underrated platformer, which played like *Sonic Adventure 2* but with a new system that saw three characters teaming up at once. Players had to swap between all three to overcome the game's challenges.

such an important part of the character. "At the audition, there was a picture of Sonic hanging up in the voiceover booth," he remembers. "The direction I got from the studio engineer was more of a question: 'If you heard a voice coming out of that blue hedgehog, what would it sound like?' I knew Sonic was all about energy and speed and youth, so I just thought it over, opened my mouth, and that's what came out. I remember that I didn't have time to rehearse it. I didn't even know what the voice was going to sound like until I was actually doing it into the microphone for the Sega folks. It just happened."

Sonic himself also got a complete overhaul with *Sonic Adventure*. Redesigned by Yuji Uekawa, a Sonic Team veteran with experience dating back to *Ristar*, the new Sonic was a much edgier creation. Taller, slimmer and somehow spikier, he'd lost a little of his friendliness but made up for it with an anime-style cool. This is the Sonic that has remained ever since, though the games have been wildly different.

Part of the reason for this was Sega's switch to multiformat development. After abandoning the Dreamcast, the company had to take Sonic to new frontiers, creating games for Microsoft, Sony and Nintendo formats for the first time. Our hero probably felt most at home on Nintendo formats, which had a similar user base to that of the Dreamcast, so both *Sonic Adventure* games were quickly ported to the GameCube, in addition to the friendly and colourful new *Sonic Heroes*. But Sega also made some rather unfortunate assumptions about its new audiences. The huge Western focus of the Xbox and PlayStation 2, for example, led Sonic Team to believe that the consoles' owners would prefer a moodier, more violent *Sonic* game, and so the developer created the terribly misguided *Shadow The Hedgehog*, in which Sonic's nemesis embarrassingly wields two handguns and drives a truck.

"As he became more 'hip with attitude', Sonic became faster and faster," notes Christian Senn of this later period of *Sonic* history. "I think it was good to push boundaries, explore new avenues, and learn what worked and what didn't so that successive games could improve. One element I think had a difficult time translating into 3D was the precision control offered in the 2D games. Pushing more towards blinding speed and combat seemed to be a trend, as well as introducing many new characters. Some amazing environments, visuals, gameplay mechanics and special effects have

Developer Quotes

"I bought a Genesis during my early days at LucasArts, and I still keep it hooked up. I have only a dozen games for it now, and two are *Sonic The Hedgehog*. The first one came with the machine. I'm not sure if I, an allegedly cool and sophisticated 20-something, would have purchased a platformer about a cute animal, but there it was, so I gave it a whirl. It was highly addictive, and I played it relentlessly. I liked zooming around, flinging myself into the air – in fact, my enjoyment of *Sonic* was not unlike my enjoyment of pinball. If I close my eyes I can still hear the jingling sound of rings."

Dave Grossman, Telltale Games

» Some series fans still can't utter the name 'Shadow' without shuddering.

» *Sonic Spinball* was turned into a rollercoaster at Alton Towers, where it remains today.

Sonic Advance 3
Game Boy Advance | 2004
The final GBA game focused on the interplay between Sonic and his co-stars. A tag system allowed you to swap between two characters on the fly, a bit like *Donkey Kong Country*, while various pairings unlocked different abilities depending on the combinations.

Sonic Rush
DS | 2005
After showing a terrible over-the-shoulder *Sonic* DS demo at E3 2004, Sega went back to the drawing board and returned with this effort. Its major innovation was the use of two screens for huge loops and other fun bits of level design.

Sonic Rivals
PSP | 2006
Though it looks like a platform game, *Sonic Rivals* is actually a pretty clever side-scrolling racing game. It's also, strangely, the first *Sonic* game to break with its roots and not be released in Japan, but don't let that put you off. It's actually pretty decent.

Sonic Riders
Multi | 2006
Yet another *Sonic*-themed racing game, this one used the same engine as the Sega-developed *F-Zero GX* and saw Sonic and chums riding hoverboards. Sadly, it was total rubbish and spent more time firing you into walls than anything else.

Sonic The Hedgehog
Multi | 2006
Sonic arrived on HD consoles in a game that looked promising and was reminiscent of the original *Sonic Adventure*, only far inferior in quality. This unfortunate reboot is the main reason that people assume all modern *Sonic* games to be rubbish.

been created throughout the years that really did appeal to me."

It's quite fashionable to write off all modern *Sonic* games as rubbish, but the truth is that they've been of varying quality, ranging from abysmal to brilliant. The 2006 version of *Sonic The Hedgehog* was a total disaster, featuring some really dodgy gameplay and a worrying relationship between hedgehog and human girl. And then there's *Sonic Unleashed*, an initially promising platform game that absolutely ruined itself with a series of awful beat-'em-up levels in which Sonic transforms into a sort of werewolf thing with big stretchy arms. But then there's *Sonic Rush*, a fun little 2D platformer with the added bonus of skating-style grinds and tricks that actually fit very comfortably into the regular gameplay. Or even the recently released *Sonic The Hedgehog 4* and *Sonic Colours*, both extremely playable platform games that happened to ditch the furry friends.

"I've got to say that *Sonic* has always worked best in 2D, in my opinion," says Jon Burton of Traveller's Tales. "I also think that the character from *Sonic Adventure* onwards changed, and I didn't like it as much. The cameras in those games I found really hard work compared to something like *Mario 64* as well."

It's certainly true that the best *Sonic* games of recent years are the ones that play in the traditional style, but you can't ignore the fact that some of the worst are also the ones with the most unnecessary additional characters.

» *Sonic Mania* will be released in early 2017 and appears to be the *Sonic* game we've all been waiting for.

Developer Quotes

"Up until the point where I had moved out on my own, I had been primarily a Nintendo fan, at least in regards to home consoles. My NES had carried me through high school and college, as the Master System hadn't quite done it for me. This changed when *Sonic* arrived on the Genesis. As a young man with little money, struggling with new-found responsibilities, it took careful consideration to determine what games I'd buy, but there was no getting around it: I had to have this amazing, impossibly fast blue creature running amok. Sonic was the character who turned me into a Sega fanatic."

James Mielke, Q Entertainment

Thankfully, Sega seems to have finally realised this and has mostly relegated them to ensemble pieces like *Mario & Sonic At The Olympic Games*, keeping the platform games focused purely on Sonic himself.

The last six years has been something of a difficult period for Sonic fans. It started off well with the 2010 release of *Sonic Colours*, which suggested that a reinvigorated Sonic Team was back on track and still able to tap into the combination of fast-paced gameplay and tight controls that had made the earlier games so much fun to play. Yes there were gimmicks, but unlike many of Sonic's friends, they enhanced, rather than impeded the gameplay. *Sonic Generations* followed in 2011 and was a wonderful tribute that celebrated Sonic's 20th anniversary and switched between acts dedicated to both Classic and Modern Sonic.

There was more Sonic brilliance in the form of two racing games that appeared in 2010 and 2012. *Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing* was a fantastic karting game from Sumo Digital that channelled the brilliance of *Mario Kart*, but was filled with a large number of loving Sega references. It helped that it was a great racing game too, with well-designed tracks and some stunning music. The sequel, *Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing Transformed*, was even better, trawling even deeper into Sega's glittery past

Sonic Timeline

A quick guide to Sonic's most memorable games... and a few others

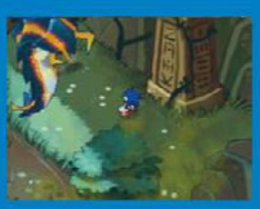
Sonic Rivals 2
PSP | 2007
Sonic Rivals 2 was pretty much more of the same as last time out, except that it expanded the cast of playable characters from five to eight. Each character was also paired off with a team-mate who would run behind them, harking back to *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*.

Sonic Rush Adventure
DS | 2007
A fairly unsuccessful sequel, *Sonic Rush Adventure* spoiled its otherwise excellent gameplay by implementing totally unnecessary seafaring sections, reminiscent of the similarly divisive sequences in *The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker*, only much worse.

Sonic And The Secret Rings
Wii | 2007
Sonic has had a fairly good run of games on the Wii, and his debut on the system was very good indeed. An over-the-shoulder platform game, it made good use of the Wii Remote's tilt controls for a fast and intuitive rollercoaster ride of an experience.

Sonic Unleashed
Multi | 2008
Titled *Sonic World Adventure* in Japan, this 3D *Sonic* game promised to revitalize the series by mixing *Sonic Adventure*-style 3D gameplay with more classic 2D assault courses. But it ruined all that by adding 'werehog' sections with tedious beat-'em-up gameplay.

Sonic Chronicles
DS | 2008
The first and only *Sonic* RPG, *Sonic Chronicles* was actually made by BioWare, the Canadian studio behind high-profile RPGs like *Mass Effect* and *Dragon Age*. *Chronicles* wasn't quite up to its usual standard but was one of the better *Sonic* spin-offs produced.



Sonic's Cameos

Sonic is so famous, he's even appeared in a bunch of other characters' games too. Here are some of the most notable

RAD MOBILE

This 3D arcade racing game from AM2 and Yu Suzuki features a Sonic-shaped air freshener hanging in front of the windscreen. Interestingly, this was actually the first appearance of Sonic, predating his Mega Drive debut by about six months.

SOLEIL

A Mega Drive RPG with similarities to *The Legend Of Zelda*, *Soleil* features a scene in which Sonic can be found sunbathing on a beach with his feet up. All that running around, defeating Dr Robotnik, must tire him out.

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 2

Years before Sega and Nintendo made friends, the latter took a swipe at Sonic here. The ranking screen features a number of famous Nintendo characters but alludes to Sonic and Earthworm Jim in the category of 'No Hopers'.

CHRISTMAS NiGHTS

This free Christmas-themed edition of Sonic Team's *NiGHTS Into Dreams* allowed you to collect several interactive Christmas gifts within the game, including one where you could play the game as Sonic and fight a huge, round Dr Eggman boss.

SUPER SMASH BROS BRAWL

After years of rumour, Sonic finally got to fight his rival in the Wii's *Super Smash Bros Brawl*, and he even got his own stage based on Green Hill Zone, with a newly rearranged version of the Angel Island Zone theme from *Sonic 3*.

"Sega wanted its own Mario; a character to help shift consoles. What it got was a character that has helped Sega through good times and bad"

and adding the ability to transform between cars, planes and boats - even the levels transformed. In 2013, the first of several Nintendo exclusive Sonic games arrived. *Sonic Lost World* was an average platformer that was clearly influenced by the superior *Super Mario Galaxies* series, while the two *Sonic Boom* games are abhorrent aberrations that even true Sonic fans struggle to love.

Things are starting to look up, though. Sega recently announced two brand new games created to celebrate the 25th anniversary of its popular hedgehog. The first, *Sonic Mania*, is gathering the most acclaim and is due out in early 2017. Although it's a digital only game, it looks like it's going to be a proper 'old school' *Sonic* platformer, remixing classic levels of old, whilst adding plenty of new ones. It's being developed by both Headcannon and PagodaWest Games and is overseen by Christian Whitehead, who used to be closely tied to the Sonic fan community, before he began collaborating with Sega on various ports such as 2011's *Sonic CD*. Graphically, it's excellent, with gorgeous sprite design that makes it look like it could have originated on Sega's 32-bit Saturn. The second title, also due in 2017 is tentatively titled *Project Sonic 2017*. Aside from a trailer, little has been shown about the new game, although we do know that 'Classic' Sonic, who last featured in *Sonic Generations*, will be making an appearance.

If you were to summarise the career of Sonic over these past 25 years, you could definitely say that he's lived an interesting life. The meteoric rise of the Mega Drive days, the explosion into popular culture, the wilderness years of the Saturn, the big comeback on the Dreamcast followed by a low point of mediocrity and over-saturation and ultimately into the modern era and its focus on quality, experimentation and classic values. When Sega first created Sonic, it wanted its own Mario; a character to help shift consoles. But what it got was something slightly different; a character that has helped Sega through good times and bad and has gone on to become a hero to all gamers, no matter which console they happen to own.

Sonic And The Black Knight

Wii | 2009

One of the more derided modern *Sonic* games, *Sonic And The Black Knight* is actually much better than it's given credit for. Set in a medieval fantasy world, it re-imagines the *Sonic* characters as knights of the round table and equips them all with swords.

Sonic The Hedgehog 4: Episode I

Multi | 2010

Returning to the series' roots, this completely 2D game starred only Sonic himself and played fairly close to the style of the original Mega Drive trilogy. Only some slightly stodgy physics stopped it from being perfect.

Sonic Colours

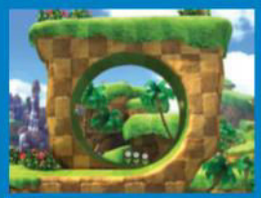
Wii | 2010

One of the best *Sonic* games in recent years, *Sonic Colours* featured mostly side-on gameplay as well as collectable Wisps that temporarily change Sonic's abilities. It almost played like a cross between *Sonic Adventure 2* and *NiGHTS Into Dreams*.

Sonic Colours

DS | 2010

The DS version of *Sonic Colours* went even further than the Wii version in its drive to return to a more classical 2D style of *Sonic* gameplay. Some people even believe that it's the superior version of the two... and they happen to be correct.



Sonic Generations

Multi | 2011

Released a few years back, *Sonic Generations* is another great *Sonic* game. Teaming up the modern version of Sonic with the more cartoony retro version, it allows you to play any stage either completely in 3D or completely in 2D. It's about time too.

GUNSTAR HEROES

Treasure's stunning debut on Sega's 16-bit console was a game that many assumed simply wasn't possible due to the machine's hardware limitations. We chat with Masato Maegawa, producer of Gunstar Heroes and president of Treasure, about the finer points of running and gunning through a gorgeous 2D world

Treasure was born in early 1992, when a group of Konami employees with a shared vision left their parent company. Their motivation for quitting such a successful developer/publisher was simple: they wanted to fully realise their own ideas, free from the restraints typically felt by individuals in large corporations. Setting a dangerously high benchmark for the then-nascent developer, Treasure's landmark first release was the result of a kitchen-sink approach to the run-'n'-gun sub-genre, bringing new ideas to a game style that was in danger of becoming stale.

Masato Maegawa, Treasure's president and *Gunstar Heroes*' producer, is an affable chap, completely modest (but realistic) about the strength of his team's productions. We ask him about the context of *Gunstar Heroes* – what led to its production? "We'd only just established our new company, Treasure, so we were just really keen above all else to do something that we liked and something that was our forte," says Maegawa. "*Gunstar Heroes* was that game. We approached the project with the concept of 'anything goes', and we incorporated many types of separate ambitious ideas in that concept."

Among those fresh ideas for the genre were numerical energy counters in place of the more common one-hit-you're-dead routine; symbolic colour labelling in lieu of character names; a heady blend of long and close-range attacks; a mishmash of auto-scrolling and player-led passages of action; weapons that could be mixed to form new attacking powers; and some of the most imaginatively constructed bosses to grace a videogame, regardless of vintage or genre, peaking in the inspired melding of a board game with a string of boss battles. To say that *Gunstar Heroes* was created with a notion of 'anything goes' is an understated simplification on Maegawa's part.

Gunstar Heroes begins with a suitably explosive cut-scene sequence, which details the plight of Gunstar 9, the planet on which most of the game is played out. Ambiguous scripting initially leaves the player with only a vague idea of what might be afoot. "WHERE IS HE? THAT LIGHT! IT'S TOO LATE!"… "NO!…

» There are some memorable characters in *Gunstar*, including Dr Black, who refuses to give up his gem to Red.

» Some ambiguous writing leaves much of *Gunstar Heroes*' world open to interpretation.

THE EARTH… UNDER ONE PERSON'S POWER…" is a classic, befuddling exchange from this opening scene. But it eventually transpires that *Gunstars*' Red and Blue need to reclaim four gemstones in order to stop Smash Daisaku ('Daisaku' being Japanese for 'epic'), an evil dictator who looks a bit like *Street Fighter*'s M Bison, from using those gems to re-power a robot called Golden Silver, which had previously caused havoc by draining planets of their natural resources. Daisaku has even kidnapped Green, the elder brother of Red and Blue, who has been tricked into working for the enemy. Once the four crucial gems are retrieved, the heroic journey of Red and Blue eventually leads to the moon of Gunstar 9, where Red and Blue have to defeat the immense (3D-effect) Core Guard System, before a final multi-stage battle against the game's assembled cast of baddies brings Golden Silver out of its sleep.

In Red and Blue, two iconic videogame characters were born. With nomenclature bordering on the nondescript, they were never likely to capture the imagination of the population at large; but Red and Blue retain a certain mystique that still lights fires in the eyes of gamers. How did *Gunstar Heroes*' characters come to be named in such a way? Maegawa confesses that it wasn't his idea, but the work of *Gunstar* team's character graphics specialist, Han.

"Maybe for Han there was some deep meaning," Maegawa says about his input, "but I think it's just a really good idea because it made it so easy for users to understand what was happening in the game."

Gunstar Heroes' development appears to have been a consummate team effort. Treasure has remained a small studio since its formation, and the first title to come out of Treasure was principally the work of just seven people. Maegawa speaks of the team in familiar terms, dropping their surnames and referring to them by the nicknames they use within Treasure to this day.

"There were only seven of us who worked on *Gunstar Heroes*: myself, as producer; Yaiman, who was the director and main programmer; Nami, who programmed the enemy AI and other routines; Han, who did the character graphics; Iuchi, who was responsible for the graphics; Non, who did all the music; and our sound effects man, Murata. It took us about ten months to develop *Gunstar Heroes* once we'd established Treasure, but even before that we'd meet in coffee shops and other places for planning sessions."

It's fascinating to visualise such coffee house meetings. Even while they remained at Konami, the core members of Treasure were regularly getting together to plot a revolution. And by finding Sega as a publisher, Treasure's coup d'état would soon be complete: *Gunstar Heroes* blew open the state of 2D platform-shooters, with Treasure rewriting the constitution.

Treasure's deal with Sega was the result of a carefully planned proposal, which suggests that the results of the 'anything goes' approach were largely determined before development began. Maegawa is understandably satisfied with the outcome of events, and stresses that none of the ideas plotted in Tokyo cafés during 1991 and early 1992 were sacrificed or compromised in production.

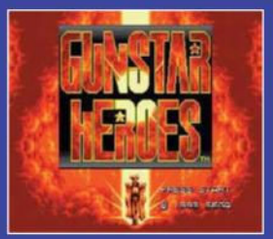
"There was nothing missing from the final version of *Gunstar Heroes*. It ended up exactly as we first planned it – everything that was in our original specification and proposal to Sega was packed into the game that was eventually sold to players."

Mission accomplished, then. Working with Sega as a publisher, Treasure had full creative control – and that was key to *Gunstar Heroes*' success. Indeed, the only issue that resulted in a difference of opinion between Sega and Treasure was the relatively trivial matter of the game's name. Treasure had considered calling its debut project '*Blade Gunner*', in honour of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, but eventually settled on '*Lunatic Gunstar*'. Maegawa looks back on this matter with good humour.

"It's true that within Treasure we referred to the game as '*Lunatic Gunstar*', right from the start," he says with a wry smile. "We felt that the word 'Lunatic' was a perfect fit to convey the

> "EVEN WHILE THEY REMAINED AT KONAMI, THE CORE MEMBERS OF TREASURE WERE REGULARLY GETTING TOGETHER TO PLOT A REVOLUTION"

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
» **DEVELOPER:** TREASURE, INC
» **RELEASED:** 1993
» **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

» Like *Super Mario Bros 3*, *Gunstar Heroes* has a big airship and is proud of it.

GUNSTAR VERSIONS

There have been six *Gunstar Heroes* releases. The original Mega Drive game appeared in September 1993. An inferior Game Gear version followed, featuring odd modifications such as a switch from mine carts to helicopter jetpacks in the Underground Mine stage; it lacked some of the original's content (most conspicuously, the Dice Palace level was dropped completely) and ran at a much lower frame rate than the Mega Drive version. An enjoyable sequel, *Gunstar Super Heroes*, was released on the GBA in 2005, but wasn't as good as the Mega Drive original. It wasn't until late 2006 that the original game resurfaced on the Wii's Virtual Console, preserved in perfect form via the wonders of emulation. More impressive still, in February 2006 Sega of Japan had published the *Gunstar Heroes: Treasure Box* as part of its PS2-based *Sega Ages* series. The disc contained both the American Genesis version of *Gunstar Heroes* and the Japanese Mega Drive code, along with a subtly different prototype build and the Game Gear version (useful purely for reference). More recently, an excellent 3D port by M2 has appeared on the 3DS.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ALIEN SOLDIER
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE, Wii VIRTUAL CONSOLE
YEAR: 1994

RADIANT SILVERGUN
SYSTEMS: SATURN, ARCADE
YEAR: 1998

GRADIUS V (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: PS2
YEAR: 2004

exhilaration of our game, what with all the explosions and detonations; but that didn't go down too well with Sega of America, who thought that the word 'Lunatic' conveyed a really bad image. Anyway, the 'Heroes' part of the title came from Sega of America – they seemed to think that 'Heroes' was a cool term because it carried a notion of there being some great sense of justice in the game – so in the end we were requested to adopt the *Gunstar Heroes* title."

Irrespective of concerns over its title, Sega must have been happy to see the results of Treasure's early Mega Drive work, especially considering the limitations of the hardware. Maegawa recalls that Treasure had to work around the Mega Drive's limited palette to achieve the desired visual style in *Gunstar Heroes*. "Because of the relatively low number of colours the Mega Drive can display, we had various difficulties in doing what we wanted to do," Maegawa explains. "At first we were drawing the backgrounds with a single palette of 16 colours, but we thought the results looked too sad and desolate, so I requested that we draw scenery with two palettes, giving us 32 colours to work with, which is what we ended up doing."

Aside from the richness of *Gunstar Heroes*' extended palette use, effects such as the rotation and scaling of sprites were used expertly to create a sense of depth. Most impressively, there can be a dozen or more characters on screen and yet the frame rate holds up almost flawlessly throughout, regardless of how explosive the action is becoming. The transformations of the Green-controlled Seven Force boss show Treasure in a cocky frame of mind, juggling and spinning sprites as though they were going out of fashion (funny thing: they were). The faux 3D of the Core Guard System, too, was a spectacle of some note in 1993, its impact almost measuring up to the feats of contemporary FX chip-powered games over on the SNES.

Gunstar Heroes' soundtrack is also hugely impressive. The score shifts in pitch and tone quite dramatically, waltzing with the on-screen action without ever stepping on its toes. We ask Maegawa how such well-judged tunes were achieved in light of the ever-changing nature of the gameplay and its themes. "Well, the music producer was Non," Maegawa reiterates, "who is still here at Treasure. He always, without fail, waits for all levels of a game to be designed so that he can experience the movement of the whole game, and then he begins his composition. And that's how he was when we worked on *Gunstar Heroes*."

» The appropriately named 'happy item room' offers sustenance and weapons in the middle of The Dice Palace.

Another vital ingredient of *Gunstar Heroes*' unrelenting punch, often overlooked, is its clever use of sound effects. From the creaking of robotic bosses' limbs to the easily identifiable and distinguishable weapons effects, Murata's work almost sounds like percussion to Non's music. We ask whether Murata worked on *Gunstar Heroes* in the same manner as Non. "Yes," says Maegawa. "In a similar style to Non, our sound effects specialist Murata waits for everything else to be in place and functional before he begins, very slowly and carefully, to apply his sound effects."

Playing *Gunstar Heroes* today, it's difficult to imagine how contemporary publishers would react to its hotchpotch design. Of course, Treasure has virtual immunity in this regard, and can apparently still get away with releasing games that defy convention (see 2001's *Freak Out* on the PS2 for a prime example of bizarre game design being smuggled past publishers and out into retail), but this is principally because of Treasure's reputation – the basis of which was laid in *Gunstar Heroes*.

There are initially four stages to play through, but these can be approached in any order. Only after these levels have been completed and the four gems have been collected does *Gunstar Heroes* shift into a linear gear.

One of *Gunstar Heroes*' most inventive stages is the Dice Maze level, where Black beckons the player to his 'strange fortress', inside which is found The Dice Palace. A board game of sorts ensues, with Red and/or Blue throwing a die to move around a board containing spaces that lead to mini-boss fights, free weapons (received in the

» Smash Daisaku attempts to cause Red to crash by throwing live soldiers at him. That's not nice.

» Being able to shoot in eight directions, even when piloting the Empire's Space Craft, is something of a boon.

"AS DEBUTS GO, GUNSTAR HEROES IS A PHENOMENAL ACHIEVEMENT – FEW DEVELOPERS HAVE MANAGED TO WORK SUCH ASSURED MAGIC IN THEIR INITIAL PROJECTS"

'happy item room'), and fights without weapons (tricky). One space is reserved for the traditional board game penalty of reversing your progress, while the final space sets up a decisive battle with the Yakuza-styled Black, who shows up in his Beat Stepper robot.

"The dice stage is really experimental," Maegawa concurs, "and again it was under the idea of 'anything' being acceptable that we decided to throw a board game into the mix. But none of us are particularly fans of board games as such…"

Other levels are also experimental. For example, the Underground Mine stage is literally 'on rails', with the action switching to a ferocious pace as Red/Blue journey deep underground on high-speed mine carts. With parallel tracks at the top/bottom or left/right (depending on the section of track, progress through the mine can be horizontal or vertical), a jump to midair enables the cart to escape from the magnetic field of one track and enter the field of another, opening the possibility of upside-down mine cart control. Nintendo's recent *Super Mario Galaxy* has been lauded for doing a similar thing – *Gunstar Heroes* was clearly ahead of its time.

As well as experimental play concepts, there are radical and unexpected shifts in style. The first stage plays like a *Contra*-esque platform-shooter – but by the fifth level Red and Blue are piloting the Empire's Space Craft in what is ostensibly Treasure's first attempt at a horizontally scrolling shmup – but still retains the omni-directional shooting system found in all other areas of *Gunstar Heroes*. Again returning to the *Gunstar Heroes* team's enthusiasm for including anything/everything in Treasure's debut production, Maegawa explains how the game came to be such a diverse proposition.

"Because we had this concept of 'anything goes', we decided that if it was fun and interesting, we would put anything into the mix. And because of that *Gunstar Heroes* ended up having shooting, action and fighting elements."

This certainly wasn't development by numbers, though. In playing the game there is no sense that *Gunstar Heroes*' design was at all contrived; in many areas, such as its insistent flitting from automated scrolling scenes to movement-led platforming sections, the game almost seems deliberately prone to challenge and confuse players, rather than sweet-talking them into appreciation of its qualities. It appears to have been the product of a wild burst

» The Ancient Ruins stage is deceptive, easing the player in with a *Contra*-style run through a bright environment.

TREASURE BEFORE TREASURE

We ask Maegawa to set the record straight: which games did he and his Treasure team actually work on while they were at Konami? Politely, he refuses, stating that he'd "rather not name specific titles, so as to avoid any potential trouble with Konami." Fair enough. "But I can tell you," he adds, "that I worked on Game Boy, Famicom and Super Famicom games for Konami while I ws there." This didn't quite sate our curiosity, so we did some research, completely unaided by Maegawa by the way, and discovered some rather startling revelations.

From what we've learned from our Japanese sources, Maegawa worked on the following games before founding Treasure: *Dracula Densetsu* (aka *Castlevania: The Adventure,* Game Boy, 1989), *Gun Sight* (aka *Laser Invasion,* NES, 1991), *Rollergames* (NES, 1991), *Bucky O'Hare* (arcade, 1992; NES, 1992).

Other Treasure members such as Yaiman, Han, Iuchi and Nami worked on these Konami titles: *Quarth* (arcade, 1989; MSX, 1990), *Aliens* (arcade, 1990), *Punk Shot* (arcade, 1990), *Akumajou Dracula* (aka *Super Castlevania IV,* Super NES, 1991), *Escape Kids* (arcade, 1991), *The Simpsons* (arcade, 1991), *Axelay* (SNES, 1992), *Contra Spirits* (aka *Super Probotector,* SNES, 1992). Iuchi also went on to do a gig as the level designer for Time Warner Interactive's rather great 1997 *Shinobi* clone *Shinrei Jusatsushi Taroumaru.*

TOUGH BOSSES

Bravoo Man is built like a brick shithouse – or at least, he's been constructed from brick – but his moves are limited to a flying spin and clumsy kick.

Pink and a couple of sidekicks called Kain and Kotaro attempt to stop Red and Blue by blocking their path with the interestingly named Pinky Loader contraption.

Seven Force is piloted by Green, who guides it through seven transformations. Iterations include a golden gun, a blue phoenix, an iron man and a tiger.

This early mid-level boss is easily beaten, and can be attacked from positions on the robot's feet and under its body, as well as from above.

Smash Daisaku challenges Red to a fight on the wings of a helicopter (yes, a helicopter with wings) before making way for his bulkier comrade, Orange, to have a go.

Doctor Black appears as the final boss of his rather strange fortress, having already led Red/Blue through a board game full of challenges.

Smash Daisaku returns, this time with a jetpack and flame-thrower. He's easy to dodge, but he has more stamina. He's all that stands between Red/Blue and the moon.

Seven Force doesn't look quite so threatening when seen in space, but it really zips about the screen and is certainly not an easy enemy to defeat.

The Core Guard System is one of *Gunstars*' few self-explanatory features. It launches a series of attacks, such as chains of orbs and miniature spacecraft.

The final boss series leads up to a fight against the revived Golden Silver robot. Before that, all of the game's main enemies reappear in sequence.

Golden Silver presents *Gunstar Heroes*' final challenge. It's effective to grab and throw him, but it's also essential that you shoot at the four gems to drain Golden Silver's power.

» Care for a piece of Gunstar Gum? Never mind in-game advertising – *Gunstar Heroes* did in-game self-promotion.

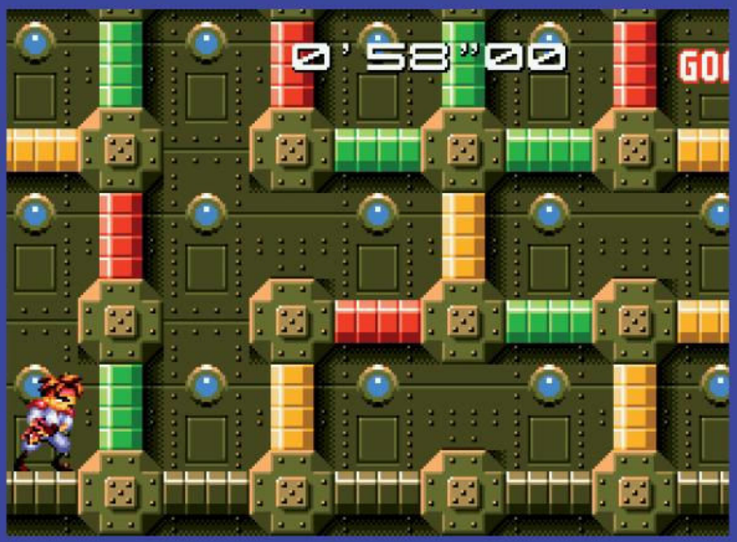
of creative thinking, and not the result of any focus testing or considerations of marketability. Maegawa confirms Treasure's slightly random and carefree methodology. "We didn't really bother about the details of how each stage was being developed," he says, "but we produced each scene with a different attitude, which led to there being plenty of variety in the game. I feel that as a result of this approach the overall balance came out really well."

Variety was also seen in the game's weapon system, which starts from a base of four weapon types (Force, Lightning, Chaser and Fire) but expands to 14 variations via the mixing of different weapon types. Red/Blue can choose one weapon initially, but have space in their primitive 'inventory' (displayed at the top of the screen) to hold two weapons simultaneously. Each of these weapons can be used in isolation, if so desired, or the two can be used in combination; the three choices on offer from each brace of weapons can be cycled through mid-game by holding A and B. It's an effective system, encouraging tactical use of weapons. Rather than simply give the player a procession of increasingly powerful weapons, Treasure decided to spread *Gunstar*'s range of attacking options in a more imaginative way.

"We developed the weapon combination system like that," says Maegawa, "because we wanted players to discover their own ways of getting through stages, and for them to have lots of different experiences according to which weapons they were using on which levels. The weapons become different when you go from Easy mode to Expert mode, as well."

As with many subsequent Treasure titles, *Gunstar Heroes* is not a huge game when measured in terms of how long it takes to get to the credits – it can be played through in an hour, if you're good – but it presents such a wealth of diverse ideas during play that it manages to project an unfeasibly large personality. This is a game, which, once played, cannot be forgotten.

The most memorable scenes in *Gunstar Heroes* are probably its boss encounters (it soon became apparent that boss design was one of Treasure's strengths, as evidenced by such incredible sights as that of the Creator in *Radiant Silvergun* and the interplanetary conclusion to *Sin & Punishment*), which span the gamut from a brick man in the form of Bravoo Man to a midget called Minion Soldier. Maegawa recognises the importance of these characters to the game's enduring appeal, citing the impact of *Gunstar Heroes*' bosses on



» Red's rather confused; he was sure that there was some way of getting to the exit…

» Mini-bosses are peppered throughout every level of *Gunstar Heroes*.

"WE FELT THAT THE WORD 'LUNATIC' WAS A PERFECT FIT TO CONVEY THE EXHILARATION OF OUR GAME, WITH ALL THE EXPLOSIONS AND DETONATIONS; BUT THAT DIDN'T GO DOWN TOO WELL WITH SEGA OF AMERICA" MASATO MAEGAWA ON THE NAMING OF GUNSTAR HEROES

players who make the effort to explore all corners of the game. "As you might expect," he says, "my favourite boss is probably the famous one: Seven Force. The seven transformations are absolutely worth seeing."

Describing features of *Gunstar Heroes* as being 'worth seeing' is wholly appropriate in a game whose overarching theme is ultimately less to do with story and more obviously centred on the fireworks of destruction. 'Anything goes' might be one recurring ideal, but the notion that 'more is more' also had an influence on Treasure's work here, and the studio's fondness for creating spectacular set pieces has never gone away. Maegawa retains a childish appreciation of pyrotechnics, along with an understanding of the power of scale.

"My favourite aspects of *Gunstar Heroes* are the way in which scenes and stages become progressively more expansive," Maegawa smiles, "and the sense of exhilaration that comes from seeing so many explosions! I think that was really refreshing for many players."

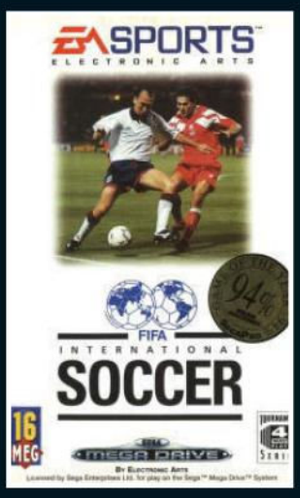
Time has been kind to *Gunstar Heroes*, and it deserves its place in the highest rank of Treasure's consistently excellent output over the past 20 years. It even received a highly enjoyable sequel for the Game Boy Advance. As debuts go, it's a phenomenal achievement – few developers have managed to work such assured magic in their initial projects. For Maegawa and friends, the creation of *Gunstar Heroes* was a cathartic experience, with their newly acquired independence fuelling their enthusiasm, and creating a super game. We ask Maegawa if Treasure faced any difficulties as independent developer.

"There isn't any particularly trying episode that I can recall from the development period – it all went really smoothly. But as we'd just established Treasure, we were of one mind in thinking, 'At last we can make the exact kind of game that we love.' We were completely absorbed in making our game and all thoroughly enjoying the project. That's what I remember foremost about making *Gunstar Heroes*."

» *3D Gunstar Heroes* was released in 2015. It's an excellent port by M2 with convincing 3D effects.

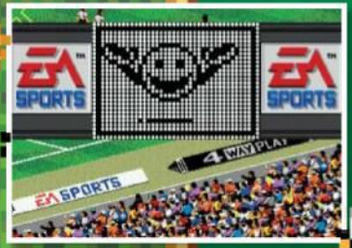
» Green realises how stupid he's been and decides to make amends with a kamikaze attack on Golden Silver.

FIFA INTERNATIONAL SOCCER



IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
- **DEVELOPER:** EXTENDED PLAY PRODUCTIONS/EA CANADA
- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **GENRE:** SPORTS



While all the cool kids are playing the latest FIFA, with our Mega Drive nestled under our arm we call for Matt Webster, the man who helped kick off the franchise 23 years ago

For many, the run up to *FIFA*'s annual release is seen as the biggest event in the videogame calendar; one that generates a global pre-season warm-up comprising excitement, fanaticism, competition against its long-standing rival in the *Pro Evolution Soccer* series and, hopefully, cause for celebration. A unique sports series, then, as it succeeds in capturing not just the action and emotions that occur on the pitch but also off it. Now seen as one of the biggest and most successful franchises in videogames, this month we look back at how this football legend was born.

Throughout the late Eighties and early Nineties EA had seen huge success releasing sports titles for the Genesis in the US, most notably with the popular *John Madden Football* and *NHL Hockey* franchises. Often regarded as a key title for Sega, the *Madden* games put an early chink in Nintendo's seemingly impenetrable armour and ultimately helped Sega to win majority share of the North American games market. Unsurprisingly, then, it was the success of these two sports series, combined with the fast growth of the console in the US and Europe, that would inform EA's decision to put a Mega Drive football game into production.

At the time, EA Sports was known as EASN (Electronic Arts Sports Network) and was being led by EA in San Mateo. It was here that a prototype football game was created utilising the *John Madden* engine, but its progress didn't get very far. Football wasn't as popular stateside as it was elsewhere in the world, and the project wasn't getting the attention it needed. With development moving slowly, EA enlisted the help of Brit Matt Webster to help get things back on track.

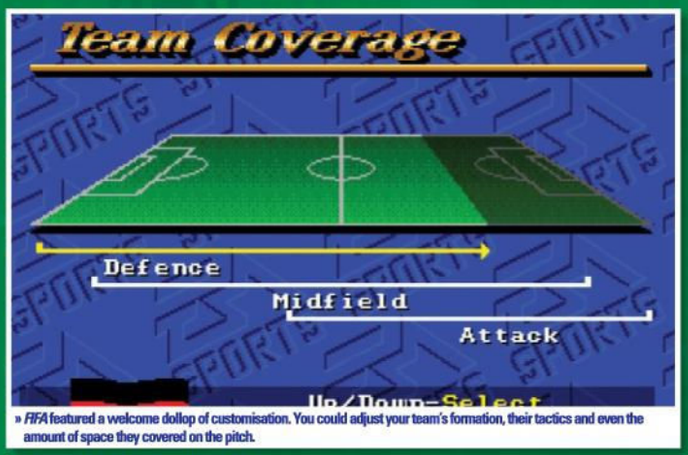
Matt, who is credited as associate producer on the game, was working at the company's newly established UK studio and began this most important of assignments by putting together a fresh new design idea for the game. And fresh it most certainly was. While most football videogames at the time adopted either side-on or top-down viewpoints, as utilised by *Kick Off* and *Sensible Soccer*, Matt settled on a rather unusual isometric perspective to represent the game. Considering that neither *John Madden Football* nor the *NHL Hockey* series had ever used such a unique viewpoint, top on our list of burning questions to ask Matt was to find out why this perspective was chosen, and whether any others were ever tested.

"In truth, the isometric viewpoint was selected partly because it was so different," Matt told us. "But mostly because I thought that we'd be able to get a better game out of it. I had pulled together the original design and vision for the game, and we were working with a couple of guys

up in Widnes. They had a cobbled together Mega Drive development set built off a Commodore Amiga. We'd asked them to look at the pseudo-3D like *Madden*, the side-scroller that was most popular at the time, and an isometric view. When we looked at the prototypes running, the isometric was just the clear winner. When you looked at them together it was a no-brainer."

Once the isometric viewpoint was settled on, work began on putting together a prototype, and it was shortly after this that EA would decide to move production to EA Canada (EAC) in Vancouver.

Located in Burnaby, British Columbia, and currently employing around 2,000 staff, EA Canada is EA's oldest and largest studio, and the place where every main *FIFA* game has been developed. The massive campus, which houses three production studios, is equipped with the latest motion and facial capture technology to ensure that player animations look as believable as possible and nary a single hair on Rooney's newly fertilised head looks out of place.



» *FIFA* featured a welcome dollop of customisation. You could adjust your team's formation, their tactics and even the amount of space they covered on the pitch.

"In truth, the isometric viewpoint was selected partly because it was so different"

"EAC was fairly new to EA, created when EA acquired [Distinctive Software] in Vancouver," remembers Matt. "There was an experienced console team there ready to go, and we figured that we could get development running quicker if we moved it there. So we took the difficult decision to cease the development with the guys in Widnes and moved it to Vancouver. These decisions aren't easy, but both of these guys ended up accepting internal positions with the newly expanding UK Studio. The remote development was challenging, but nightly calls and weekly deliverables meant that we could stay on top of the development. The fact is that the team at EAC were very strong, experienced already with EA's amazing development tools that existed on the Sega console, so progress was fast."

Despite the obvious stresses that come with long-distance working relationships, with a fresh and innovative new plan of attack and a passionate captain leading the

...AND OFF THE PITCH

LIKE EA'S ESTABLISHED early Mega Drive sports franchises, the presentation throughout *FIFA International Soccer* was exemplary. It allowed players to tweak the rules of play, let you and three friends play together using EA's 'four-way play' adaptor, and featured an innovative action-replay mode that allowed you to stop the action and replay the last few moments of gameplay, among other things. The thought and extra effort made by the EA team to ensure that *FIFA* gave footy fans the complete sports package was undoubtedly a big factor in its success.

Curious as to whether there was anything the team had to drop from the original game, we put the question to Matt. "We ended up cutting out large amounts of variety in the crowd chants," he replied. "The things I remember feeling sorry about was the player-controlled celebration stuff. I really wanted to be able to ram it home when I scored against a friend, but it was great when that went in the following year!"

experienced team of developers, development of EA's isometric football game began to take shape as the EAC team "immersed themselves in the sport" and set about creating an authentic football experience for gamers.

"We started with how the players looked as you controlled them," said Matt. "The isometric view meant that we could get a ton more detail than ever before. I was also able to tune the formation and AI editor, which was linked to where the ball was on the pitch. If the team responded in the right way to where the ball was, then everything flowed together to give a more realistic feel than had gone before. Audio then really came to the fore as we put the crowd chants into a footy game for the first time. The atmosphere really came through."

As well as trying to capture the look and atmosphere of football, the team at EAC also gave careful consideration to how the game would be played. Football games of the time typically assigned one button for passing, lobbing and shooting, but there was often a sense that this was more out of necessity than choice, be it technical limitations on the number of player animations or controller design restricting the number of buttons afforded to players. For *FIFA* the team utilised the power of Sega's 16-bit console and its three-button control pad to incorporate an array of moves into the game. This was something that was especially important to Matt.

"As I said, I wanted to be able to do more than just kick the ball. To create moves you need to build up to a shot. I wanted that depth. Being able to see the team responding to the ball and player position, and seeing the action differently to that which had gone before, really showed that we had something more than our competitors. Gave us an edge."

What struck critics and fans most about *FIFA International Soccer* was the high level of presentation in the game, and this has remained a hallmark of the series. Though the player sprites were identical, they were extremely well animated, able to perform impressive flying headers, back heels, bicycle kicks and theatrical dives. And while the quasi-3D perspective can make it difficult to judge the position of the ball at times, the viewpoint did offer a good playing field for those players who liked to pass the ball and think about their approach. Indeed, rather than use whichever player had possession to dash towards the opposition's goal and shoot, *FIFA*'s design and gameplay encouraged players to take a more considered route towards goal. This was something Matt really wanted to instil into the gameplay.

"I felt that you could see more and get a deeper sense of building up a move with the isometric view," he explains. "The competition at the time was very much about twitch control of the way the player interacted with the ball. For me, at the time, I wanted to see across the pitch and have a sense of crossing

» Though born and still living in Canada, *FIFA* was conceived in Britain. Doesn't it make you proud?

"We put the crowd chants in for the first time and the atmosphere really came through"

EVOLUTION OF FIFA

LOOKING BACK AT highlights from the past 23 years of videogaming's most successful football franchise...

1. FIFA International Soccer

2. FIFA Soccer 95

3. FIFA Soccer 96

4. FIFA 97

10. FIFA Football 2003

11. FIFA Football 2004

12. FIFA Football 2005

13. FIFA 06

14. FIFA 07

» US sports pundit Ron Barr was *FIFA*'s original face. He was a man of very few words and liked to repeat himself. Probably why he was dropped in *FIFA 95*.

the ball laterally ahead of a player to run on to."

For most of its development the game was known as *EA Soccer* within the walls of EAC. The FIFA licence actually came as a late but vital goal, and is now a badge of honour that the series has proudly worn for 18 years. For many, that close affiliation with football's governing body is what makes *FIFA* the only football game to play.

While the late FIFA affiliation meant that the series didn't really make best use of the licence until the release of *FIFA Soccer 95*, which introduced club teams, authentic kit colours and player names to the mix, securing FIFA's blessing was certainly an important moment for the franchise. It gave EA exclusive use of licensed clubs, kits and player likenesses, and, of course, the leagues – most importantly the English Premiership, which was established around the time that the original *FIFA* was in production. So just how difficult was it to convince FIFA to let EA use the licence for its game at the time?

"It wasn't hard at all," admits Matt. "I did a bit of research and found a name at FIFA of somebody connected with external relations, made the call and then passed it on to our marketing department to close out. At the time, FIFA wasn't a commercial heavyweight as it's become now. It was a natural addition to the EA Sports line-up so, in a way, having NHL and the NFL relationships helped us."

To date there have been 22 releases in the main *FIFA* series and around 30 spin-off games, with some of the latter falling inside the successful *FIFA Street* and *FIFA Manager* franchises. Selling more than 100 million copies worldwide, *FIFA* is now one of the bestselling videogame franchises ever, and in all that time has remained in the care of EA Canada.

Now a senior producer at Criterion Games, a subsidiary of EA, Matt no longer has anything to do with the *FIFA* series, but there's no doubt it's a series that he is incredibly proud to have played such a key role in creating.

Noticing that we're entering the last few moments of injury time, we therefore finish up by asking Matt for his thoughts on the last 18 years of the franchise and why he thinks it remains so popular today. "It's retained its easy-to-pick-up roots, something that a number of years ago it was derided for, but it's important that anyone can feel like they can get a game and score a goal. It's authentic, looks amazing and plays beautifully. You can't help but be entertained when you play a game. When you watch someone play, it looks like you're watching a real match. The commentary system is a total revelation. I'm in awe of what the team at EAC has achieved over the last [20] years or so with the game. It's remarkable."

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

JOHN MADDEN FOOTBALL
(PICTURED)
SYSTEM: AMIGA, MEGA DRIVE, SNES
YEAR: 1990

ROAD RASH
SYSTEM: AMIGA, ATARI ST, GAME BOY, GAME GEAR, MEGA DRIVE, MEGA-CD
YEAR: 1991

THE NEED FOR SPEED
SYSTEM: 3DO, DOS, PLAYSTATION, SATURN
YEAR: 1994

» The *FIFA* series kept the isometric engine for its entire tenure on the Mega Drive. Amazingly, the final release for the system was *FIFA 2000*.

5. FIFA 98: Road To World Cup

6. FIFA 99

7. FIFA 2000

8. FIFA 2001

9. FIFA Football 2002

15. FIFA 08

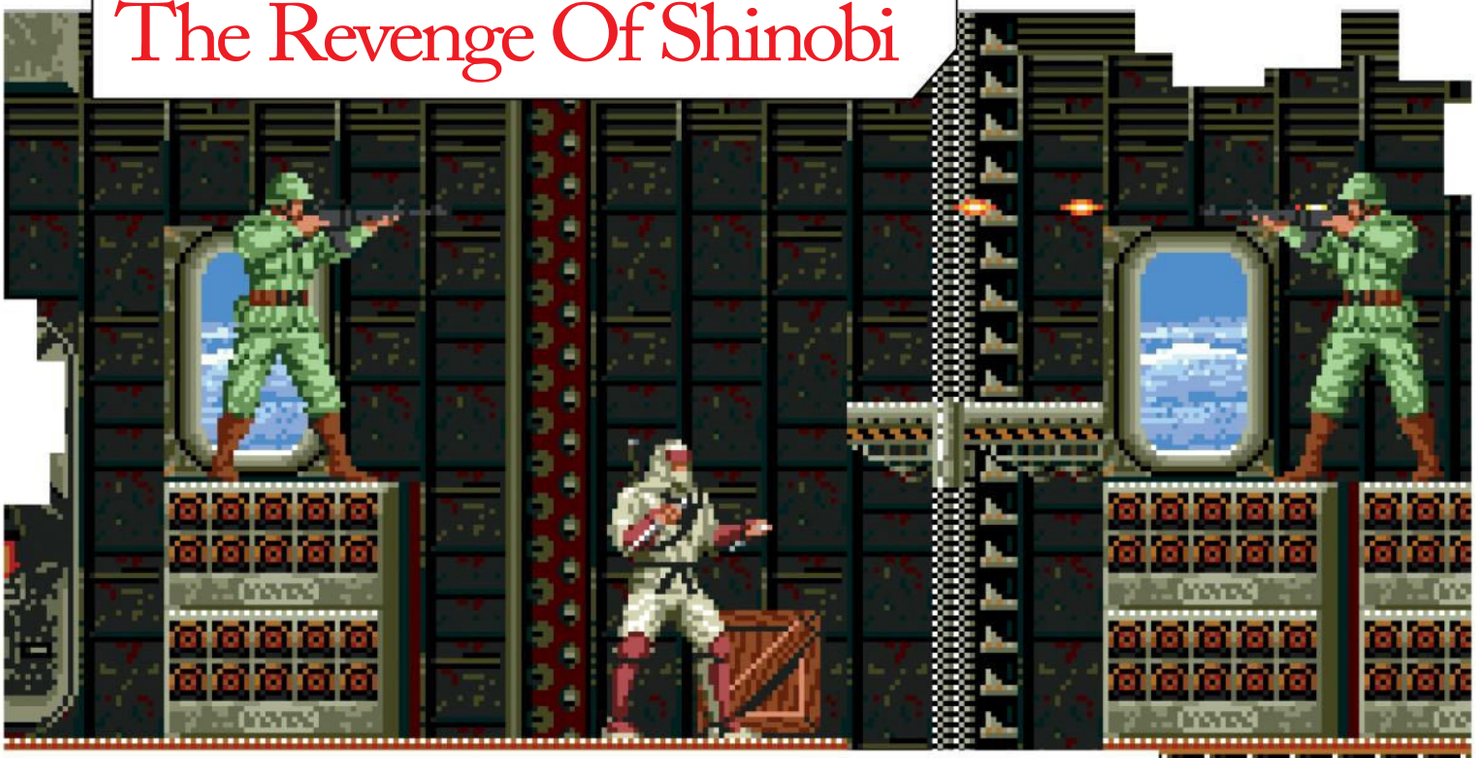
16. FIFA 09

17. FIFA 11

18. FIFA 15

19. FIFA 17

The Revenge Of Shinobi



Instant Expert

Due to Sega cheekily borrowing the likenesses of various pop culture icons for many of the game's end-of-level guardians, five slightly different iterations of the game have found release.

The Revenge Of *Shinobi* was released in 1989. It was directed by creator Noriyoshi Ohba with Shizuoka Taro (*Space Harrier II*) working as lead programmer.

The game's revered soundtrack was written by Yuzo Koshiro. Working freelance for Sega at the time, he went on to compose for a clutch of Sega classics, most notably the *Streets Of Rage* series.

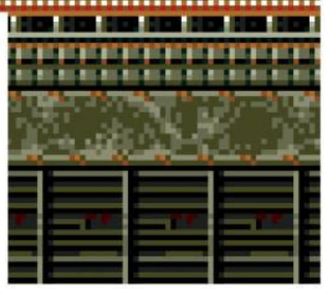
There have been 13 *Shinobi* games in total, but Joe has only appeared in six of them. This tally includes the Western version of MD *Shadow Dancer*, which substituted out Joe's son for Joe.

The series has seen Joe's son, Hayate, and Joe's grandson (who is also named Joe) appear as central characters.

In 2002, THQ and Sega released a Game Boy Advance game titled *The Revenge Of Shinobi*. Despite what its title insinuates, it is neither a port nor a follow up to the Mega Drive game.

The Revenge Of Shinobi did find its way to arcades courtesy of Sega's Mega-Tech arcade board, which was based on Mega Drive hardware.

With five iterations, ninjitsu spells and no shortage of memorable bosses, we don a white Shinobi Shozoku and piece together everything you need to know about Joe Mushashi's second, and best, mission



That *The Revenge Of Shinobi* is still considered by many to be one of the best action games to ever find release on the Mega Drive is a true testament to its brilliance. Released over 20 years ago, some six months or so after the Mega Drive's official launch in Japan, Joe Musashi's second adventure (entitled *Super Shinobi* in Japan) has gone on to become one of the machine's most enduring titles, and serves as conclusive proof that the best games don't necessarily come to us towards the end of a console generation.

Released in the wake of *Space Harrier* and *Super Thunderblade* – two pretty lacklustre Sega Mega Drive arcade sequels – *The Revenge Of Shinobi* came to effortlessly leave its mark on Mega Drive owners. This was largely thanks to its canny blend of arcade action, its jaw-dropping visuals, having one of the most memorable videogame soundtracks of all time and also for some cheeky unlawful impersonating and sometimes blatant use of a few well-established pop culture icons for its enemies and bosses, which forced the developer to make a series of revisions to the game to ensure they avoided litigation (turn the page to find out more).

It may surprise some of you to learn that the most recent revision of the game occurred as late as last year when the game was unshackled from copyright handcuffs, which was due to its inclusion of Spider-Man (which Sega no longer holds the videogame rights to – it's now Activision), and saw its first downloadable release through Nintendo's Virtual Console service, marking the fifth and very likely last incarnation of the game to find release.

Out with the old, in with the new

With its history rooted in the short-frills nature of arcade gaming, *The Revenge Of Shinobi* can be seen as one of the first – and arguably best – examples of Sega daring to do something a little different with one of its established arcade brands. The game was directed and overseen by *Shinobi* creator Noriyoshi Ohba, who, with the help of his small team, set about pushing the franchise in a subtle new direction. That's not to say *The Revenge Of Shinobi* eschews its arcade heritage, rather it cleverly carries over the iconic parts from the original coin-op (the use of magic, the many Western pop culture influences and memorable bosses) but omits those elements that feel inherent to arcade gaming (having no health bar, simplistic level structure and gameplay). In doing this Sega created a game that felt bigger, better and more suited to console gaming, while at the same time it offered a true showcase of the impressive technical capabilities of its new 16-bit machine.

For the benefit of those not familiar with the series, *The Revenge Of Shinobi*'s story followed on

Pixel Perfect

Your guide to the characters of The Revenge Of Shinobi. How many have you seen?

» Joe Musashi

» Blue Lobster

» Infantry Grunt

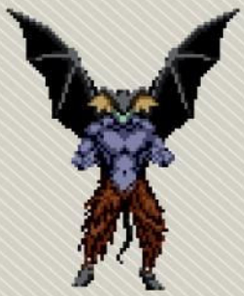
» Zeed Ninja - Wings

» Purple Phoenix

» Zeed Ninja - Green

» Kasumi

» Doppelgänger - Batman



» Doppelgänger - Devilman

» The Terminator

» The Terminator - Cyborg

» Infantry Grunt - Grenadier

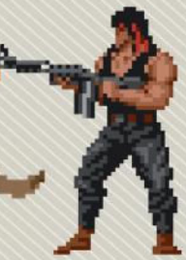
» Shadow Dancer

» Pink Dragon

» Red Dragon

» Flamethrower Grunt

» Attack Dog



» Rambo

» Shogun - Red

» Blue Dragon

» Shogun - Blue

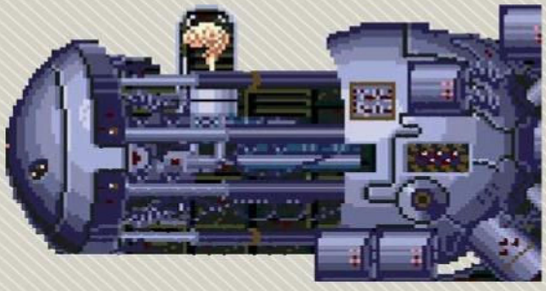
» Zeed Ninja - Black

» Kasumi - Disguise

» Godzilla

» Doppelgänger - Spider-Man

» Infantry Grunt - Ground



» Supercomputer

» Neo Zeed Leader

Critical Reception

What the gaming press thought...

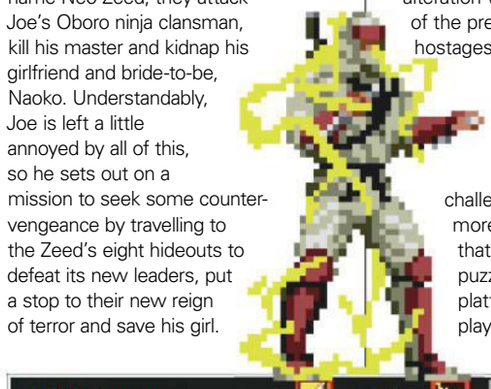
"One of the most outstanding games on the Mega Drive... The graphics are exquisite, the music superb, and the gameplay out of this world!"

- **MEAN MACHINES** 1990

directly from the original. It saw the return of the series' recurring antagonist, a shady criminal organisation known as Zeed, that decides to exact revenge on Joe after he foils their plans at the end of the first game. Newly reformed, now under the slightly flashier-sounding name Neo Zeed, they attack Joe's Oboro ninja clansman, kill his master and kidnap his girlfriend and bride-to-be, Naoko. Understandably, Joe is left a little annoyed by all of this, so he sets out on a mission to seek some counter-vengeance by travelling to the Zeed's eight hideouts to defeat its new leaders, put a stop to their new reign of terror and save his girl.

Change is definitely a good thing

The sequel made a number of changes to the existing *Shinobi* template. Perhaps the most noteworthy alteration was the dropping of the previous 'free all the hostages to progress' gameplay. Instead, it was made simpler with Joe having to find and reach the exit to finish the stage. This was made challenging, though, through more intricate level design that included environ-based puzzles and the odd tricky platform section to test players. The game's levels were more varied too, with Joe's mission taking him from idyllic locales in Japan, a dazzling nightclub, the top of a speeding commuter train, and ending in a well-fortified marine base. This sense of variety bled into other areas of the game too, with Joe given a much deeper combat system to play with.



» Certain stages revert back to the dual-plane mechanic utilised in the original *Shinobi* coin-op.

While he kept his shurikens and katana (which he uses for close-quarters combat) from the first game, his ninjitsu spells were now split between offensive and defensive attacks. Players were also forced to conserve shurikens (Joe had an unlimited reserve in the first game), which also helped to imbue a subtle sense of strategy.

As well these various gameplay tweaks, the sequel also boasted better visuals through its great use of the Mega Drive's powerful M68000 processor, and came packaged with what many regard as one of the single greatest videogame soundtracks ever. Written by famed videogame composer Yuzo Koshiro, who later composed equally resplendent scores for the *Streets Of Rage* games and *Beyond Oasis (The Story Of Thor)*, the sublime soundtrack to the game is a real audio treat, and helps to further cement *The Revenge Of Shinobi*'s status as a true videogame classic and the very best episode in the series.

Twin Galaxies High Scores

NTSC
- **NAME:** ANTONIO R. FILHO
- **POINTS:** 1,070,600

PAL
- **NAME:** ANDREW PETE MEE
- **POINTS:** 37,600

NTSC
- **NAME:** DANIEL C TEIXEIRA
- **FASTEST COMPLETION:** 16.13 MINS

PAL
- **NAME:** ASHLEY JACKSON
- **FASTEST COMPLETION:** 26:03 MINS

Joe's Ninja Arsenal

As well as his katana sword, Joe's not short of some fancy ninja armaments and spells to aid him on his revenge mission

»Shurikens /Throwing Knives
Joe's standard long-range weapons; conserving them is vital.

»POW
Increases the power of shurikens/ throwing knives so they can break through enemy defences.

»Ikazuchi
A thunder spell that surrounds Joe with lightning bolts to protect him from enemy attacks.

»Karyu
A spell from the first game. It causes dragons made of flames to rise from the ground and attack all foes.

»Fushin
Gives Joe enhanced agility to get around the game's tricky platform sections.

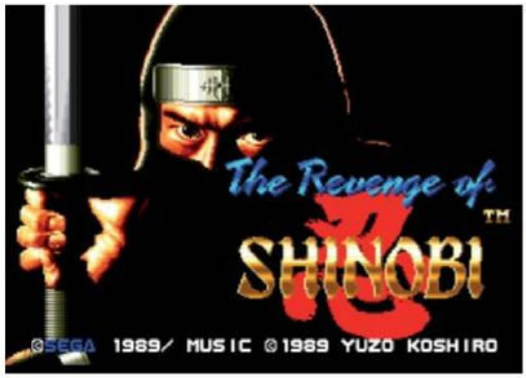
»Mijin
This offensive spell causes Joe to explode, attacking everything on screen. This is at the cost of a life.

Memorable Moments

Our favourite bits from The Revenge Of Shinobi

Flashy flash screen

The game's title screen shows a picture of martial arts actor, Sonny Chiba, and is taken from the television series *Kage No Gundan*. Oddly, it gives the impression that Sonny is seen dressed in a black Shinobi Shozoku, despite the fact Joe's attire is white.



IN THE YEAR 19XX. THE EVIL
CRIME SYNDICATE "ZEED" WAS REDUCED
TO RUBBLE BY THE POWERS OF STEALTH
POSSESED BY THE SHINOBI MASTER.
JOE MUSASHI.
IT SEEMED AS IF THE WORLD HAD
RETURNED TO PEACE...
BUT THREE YEARS LATER...

Scene setting

The intro offers us our first true snippet of information about Joe's past. He's from a clan of ninjas known as the Oboro and was due to wed Naoko. That was before Neo Zeed kidnapped her, attacked his clan and murdered his master.

Whiter than white

TROS marks the first time in the series that we see Joe wearing his lustrous white Shinobi Shozoku. It's certainly a far more striking costume than the boring grey and yellow number from the first game.

Joe be nimble

It's fair to say that, in the original *Shinobi*, Joe wasn't the most agile of ninjas. This point was addressed in the sequel, where Joe was given a handy but tricky-to-perform double-jump that enabled him to navigate around the levels easier.

Spell casting

While Joe's Ninjitsu spells were in the first game, Sega was starting to think a lot harder about how it could better implement them in the sequel. It stumbled on incorporating defensive, as well as offensive, spells in the game.

Panic at the disco

Perhaps the most memorable boss battle in the game is the fight against the yellow *Shadow Dancer* ninja in a nightclub at the end of the second stage. An inspired mix of visual effects and music make this a standout moment.

Sonic Boom

The soundtrack is widely considered to be one of the best videogame scores of all time. It's a joyous blend of emotive Japanese compositions and techno beats, and serves as another fitting example of the series' 'East meets West' theme.

A visual treat

With its nicely detailed characters and variety of levels that made brilliant use of the Mega Drive's parallax scrolling capabilities, it's easy to see why the game became so popular on its release. This or *Altered Beast*? No contest.

Unlicensed to kill

TROS is famed for its unauthorised use of various pop culture icons in the game, of which include Godzilla, Spider-Man and Batman. When their respective owners found out, Sega was forced to alter the offending sprites.

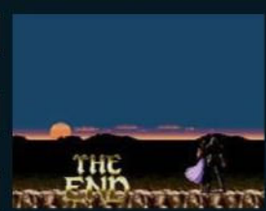
Getting in a muddle

The levels in the game are larger than those in the prequel and many contain subtle puzzle or platformer elements. The game concludes with a tough final stage that sees Joe getting lost in a labyrinth inside Neo Zeed's marine hideout.

Happy endings

The final boss fight sees Joe racing to defeat the Neo Zeed leader before Naoko, who's trapped in a cage, is crushed by the lowering stone ceiling. It's a dramatic conclusion to the game, and a final and fitting test of skill for any *Shinobi* fan.

There are two endings to The Revenge Of Shinobi - good and bad. The good ending is widely considered one of the hardest videogame challenges, and is your reward for defeating the Neo Zeed leader before the ceiling flattens Joe's fiancée. If you've managed to see the good ending, well done – you may now change your name to Joe Mushashi by Deed Poll.



The Revenge Trail

The Bride's tale of vengeance in *Kill Bill* may have had some epic moments of comic book violence and its fair share of memorable fights, but it pales in comparison to Joe's mission of reckoning. We plot his bloody trail for revenge after his Oboro clansmen are attacked, his master killed and his girlfriend kidnapped.

01 Ibaraki Province, Japan

The first stage plonks Joe in familiar ninja surroundings. Featuring bamboo thickets and shoin-zukuri architecture, Joe must battle ninjas and attack dogs to reach The House Of Confusion – which, oddly, isn't all that confusing when you arrive there. With switches and a hidden underground passageway, it demonstrates straight away the subtle gameplay changes Sega made to the gameplay.

Boss: Blue Lobster

This boss may only have one tedious attack but his tough samurai armour makes him no pushover. His weak spot is his head, which he leaves open every time he makes his attack. Make easy work of him by repeatedly dodging his sword attack with a timely double-jump shuriken spray attack – just ensure you've been conserving those shurikens.

02 Tokyo

The first section is probably one of the trickiest in the game. Set against a canyon, Joe must rely on his ninja agility to get around by jumping between logs as they travel down a waterfall. The second is simple straightforward side-scrolling beat-'em-up action, taking place on the dark streets and rooftops of Tokyo where martial artists and female assassins dressed as nuns try to take him down.

Boss: Shadow Dancer

This stage ends in an impressive-looking nightclub where Joe must face off against the Shadow Dancer, a yellow ninja who can create a trail of doppelgangers of himself like some kind of human ninja centipede. Each doppelganger takes one hit to kill, and when he's down to his true form he blends into his dark surroundings like a chameleon.

03 Military Base

Enemies on this level include armed guards, more attack mutts and flamethrower-wielding *Rambo* lookalikes – although these are substituted for bald guys in later versions. This section is notable for being the first of two stages in the game that pay homage to the dual-plane mechanic from the first *Shinobi*, with Joe jumping between the foreground and background to take out his enemies. The second section is set aboard an airship, and Joe must be mindful of the ship's airlocks, which pull him out the stage at the cost of a life.

Boss: Supercomputer

One of the more unusual bosses in the game is this large laser-guarded supercomputer, which is running from a human brain. The brain serves as the rather obvious weak spot of this boss, and must have been extracted from a nosey idiot ninja as it keeps popping in and out of its protective metal casing to take a look at the action, which is Joe's time to strike.

04 Detroit

This stage takes place in the rundown-looking Detroit, and has obviously been inspired by Paul Verhoeven's bleak vision of the city in *Robocop*. The second stage, which takes place inside some kind of automobile manufacturing factory, also riffs off *The Terminator*, with Joe avoiding crushing machinery as he works through the level's maze-like design using his ninja agility and the environment to find the exit.

Boss: The Terminator

Signalling the first of *TROS*'s many litigation-baiting bosses, this familiar-looking muscle man draws things to a memorable close on the fourth stage. With giant chest and sunglasses, this car-tossing boss is clearly based on Arnold Schwarzenegger. However, when he gets hit he slowly turns green with rage like The Incredible Hulk... that is until his skin breaks away to reveal a T-800-style endoskeleton, which then explodes.

06

Chinatown

Similar to the second stage of the Tokyo level, this level sees Joe beating down martial art gangs and more fake nuns through the dimly lit streets of Chinatown. The second section sees Joe fighting ninjas on top of a speeding train while avoiding steel obstructions – get hit once and it wipes out a life.

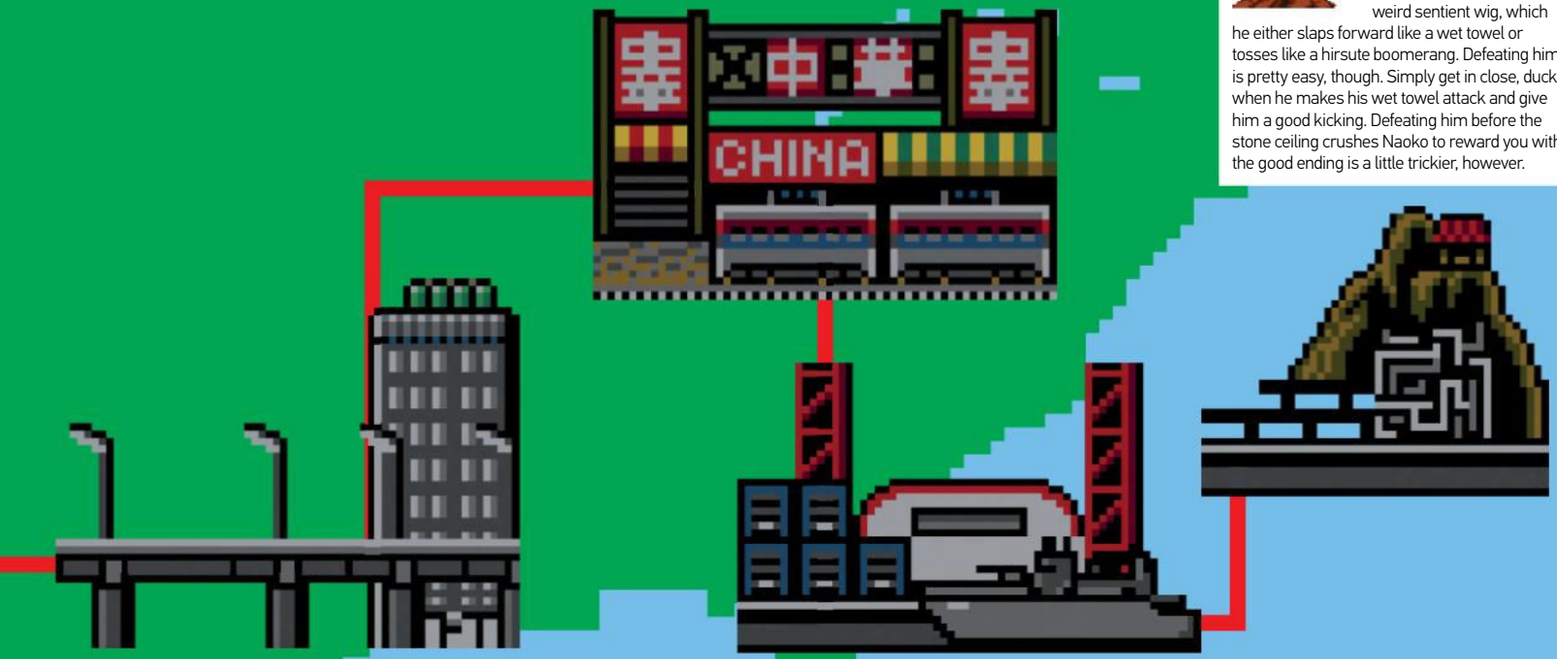
It's certainly a tense and tricky level to beat, but the setting, coupled with the two-part boss fight that ends this stage, makes it one of the standout levels in the game.

Boss: Spider-Man

Marvel's mouthy web-slinger makes a cameo at the end of the scene, in what is possibly the Mega Drive's first ever WTF moment. Spidey sticks himself to the ceiling and fires down webs to trap Joe, occasionally dropping down to hit him. Sega actually held the licence to Spider-Man when it produced *The Amazing Spider-Man Vs. The Kingpin*, so Spidey appears in every version of the game bar the most recent VC release. His proper Marvel signed-off appearances, though, are found in versions 1.02 onwards – distinguished by a copyright message on the start screen.

Boss: Batman/Devilman

To at least keep things fair, Sega decided not to discriminate between the two big comic book publishers, so after Spidey has been beaten in comes Bats to finish the fight. The Caped Crusader only appears in version 1.0. From 1.01 onwards Sega replaced him with Devilman, a character based on a Japanese manga who actually went on to appear in two of his own videogames.



05

Area Code 818

According this stage's title, this level takes place in California. The first section sees Joe fighting to reach the top of a skyscraper fortified with armed guards and gun emplacements, while the second section (which feels very reminiscent of the first level of *Dragon Ninja*) is set on a freeway. Here, Joe fights nun-dressed assassins and soldiers while avoiding speeding traffic.

Boss: Ballistic Missile

This end boss is a typical *Shinobi* guardian: a giant mode of transportation. This speeding ballistic missile carrier pegs down the freeway and Joe must stop it before it reaches its destination. To do this Joe must destroy the three bulbous weak spots found on its roof. This won't be easy, however, as they're protected by cannons and an electric pulse that travels down the entire length of the carrier.

07

New York

No videogame featuring ninjas would be complete without a stage set in New York, and that's exactly where the penultimate level is set. Weirdly enough, perceptive *Shinobi* fans may notice that this stage looks very similar to the second stage of *Shinobi*. It takes place around the city's docklands, with Joe avoiding a drenching by jumping onto dinghies and bollards. The second part sees Joe inside a container ship full of armed guards. Wonder what they could be hiding in there that's so important?

Boss: Godzilla

It's Godzilla, of course. Use his sluggish speed to your advantage by drawing him to one end of the screen, attacking his head while avoiding his fire-breath attack, and then double-jumping over his tiny cranium to repeat the process at the other end. In version 1.03, Sega replaced Godzilla with a giant dinosaur skeleton.

08

Neo Zeed Marine Stronghold

This is it – the final stage of the game. Yet for all its promise and cinematic buildup it ends on a bit of a frustrating note. The first section is very similar to the New York docklands stage, and sees Joe battling to reach Neo Zeed's heavily guarded stronghold. Then, once inside, he is greeted by a perplexing maze of entrances and exits, and must find the correct doorway that will lead him to his betrothed.

Boss: Neo Zeed Leader

The Neo Zeed leader is basically just an evil troll doll, attacking Joe with his weird sentient wig, which he either slaps forward like a wet towel or tosses like a hirsute boomerang. Defeating him is pretty easy, though. Simply get in close, duck when he makes his wet towel attack and give him a good kicking. Defeating him before the stone ceiling crushes Naoko to reward you with the good ending is a little trickier, however.

CASTLE OF ILLUSION

SCREW FANTASIA, HERE'S THE REAL DEAL

» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
» **RELEASED:** 1990
» **GENRE:** PLATFORMER
» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** MEGA DRIVE

HISTORY

Despite arriving early on in the console's life, it's quite astonishing to realise that Mickey's very first Mega Drive outing remains one of the greatest platformers ever to appear on the 16-bit console.

Just look at this screenshot. Back in 1990 this was cutting edge stuff, and even today it manages to hold its own against more recent platformers. Mickey is an absolute masterpiece in sprite design, and while his animation routines may now look a little ropey, he's still filled with more charm and character than a dozen Ratchet and Clanks. Indeed, when *Castle Of Illusion* first appeared it was so impressive that you could have sworn you were taking part in an interactive cartoon, such was its beauty.

Outstanding graphics told only half the story, as, with saccharine soundtrack in tow, *Castle Of Illusion* presented you with some of the finest level design around. Granted it wasn't a tough game to complete, but the beautifully crafted stages ensured that you wanted to return to them again and again and again. But then, Sega had crammed so much variety into each and every stage that you just had to revisit them – if only so you could take everything in.

For example, one minute you're being chased down a hill by a huge apple, the next you're leaping into a giant's cup of tea and swimming around in the hot brew, while later stages saw you swinging from light switches, taking massive leaps of faith over immense holes and daintily stepping past cute spiders whilst making your way through the cobweb-infested level that we've shown here.

Crikey, we've run out of space and haven't even had a chance to cover *Castle Of Illusion*'s many bosses. Just take our word for it that they are as challenging as they are inventive. Enough already, just play the damn thing and wash away those *Fantasia* memories forever.

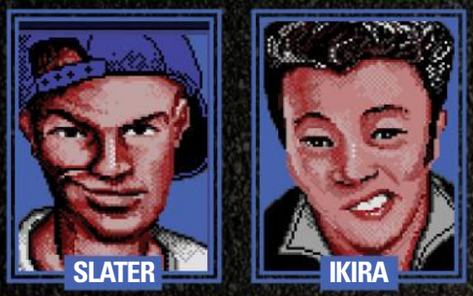
Was it really as simple as Super Hang-On with fighting, or was it so much more? Adam Barnes looks back at EA's motorbike racing game to discover what truly made it stand out

Considering videogames' penchant for violence, it seems like such an unusual thing to praise *Road Rash* for – but among its stablemates this was perhaps the element that most stood out. Sega's own *OutRun* and *Hang-On* had already been pinching pennies from addicted gamers in the arcades, so when they finally came over to the Mega Drive it was only natural they'd be met with something of a furore. Even Taito's arcade racer, *Chase HQ*, and its predecessor, *Full Throttle*, had set something of a standard for this particular breed of into-the-screen racer, so when EA wanted to bring its own take on the thrills of motorbike racing, it needed to pull out all the stops. It didn't have the arcade heritage, after all, so *Road Rash* needed something to stand out, it needed something advantageous to become a critical and commercial success.

By the time of its 1991 release on the Mega Drive, *Road Rash* already had a template with which to concern itself. While racing against other

ROGUE'S GALLERY

Meet the various rivals looking to put you on the ground



» There was a sense of place and scale to *Road Rash* that most racing games didn't seem to have. It felt like you were heading into the horizon, rather than a static backdrop.

competitors you would need to navigate the various bends and trials of the US highways. As with *Super Hang-On* the trick was in the careful manipulations as you turned, ensuring each corner was taken at the perfect combination of speed and correct angle. *Road Rash* mimicked that sensation elegantly, but the thing that made it feel so *different* wasn't nearly as graceful. Among the various challenges you'd encounter – such as the oncoming traffic and the corners – the addition of vehicular combat added a whole new dimension. Riders could kick and punch each other, lowering their stamina and their ability to stay atop their bikes, opening a whole new element to the racing genre. Rather than most combat games where the environment was stationary, here, with *Road Rash*, it was ever changing, and how you could react to your opponents was affected completely by your situation. Notice an oncoming car? Well that's the perfect opportunity to launch a rival into its path, timing your shunt *just* right to put them out of the race. Not permanently, of course, but it was an advantage all the same. Or how about slightly nudging them closer to the edge of a particularly sharp corner, causing them to careen off the track onto the rough terrain and (most likely) into a passing tree or road sign. It brought a whole new level to the racing genre, and helped solidify the game's status as a must-have.

» After completing a race you were given a race results screen which depicted your crew of Rashers hanging out together at a pit stop of some kind.

» To proceed to the next level you had to place at least fourth or better in the difficult races.

But there was more to it than that. Where other racers of the time had implemented hills and undulations in their tracks, none matched *Road Rash*'s physics system. An incline would slow the bike allowing for a very realistic feel to the bikes themselves. It allowed for truly exciting races as you barrelled down a hillside and sped around a bend, and the physics even enabled you to hop over the peaks of certain hills and launch yourself high into the air. The added challenge of having to adapt your turning while doing so on an incline was something of a revelation at the time. This was *Road Rash*'s advantage: while *Super Hang-On*'s sense of speed was a thrill, it was artificial. Even *Chase HQ*'s use of bumps had little impact on your actual speed, which made *Road Rash* feel all the more compelling.

But where *Chase HQ* had you playing as the good guys – the right side of the law – *Road Rash* stayed

"It brought a whole new level to the racing genre, and helped solidify its status as a must have"

in keeping with its renegade street racer appeal. Here, the police were a threat, a means of weeding out the weaker players not able to keep up, or punishing the lax racers unable to ride safely. It wasn't common to be arrested early on in the game, but as the difficulty in stages ramped up, it became as hard to stay on the track – and, therefore, your bike – as it was to shake the increasingly tougher rivals and police force. By the end, having not seen the failure screen prompt 'Busted!!!' would have been something of a feat.

Road Rash being released on the Mega Drive was something of a necessity, then. The console was capable of the higher speed calculations that were really needed to match the arcade feel that EA had so clearly wanted to recreate, and that sense of speed couldn't have happened elsewhere. Electronic Arts was emboldened by its successes on the Mega Drive, yet it was *Road Rash* that advertised what was capable on the machine. While Sega would focus on its own *Super Hang-On* – and the title's arcade heritage meant that was a safe bet for the console manufacturer – gamers in the know would flock to EA's motorbike racing game. The popularity imbued further success for the thriving developer and publisher, but it also lead to expansion for the franchise. Sequels were expected, but the original itself saw it ported to a heap of different platforms from the technically comparable but much slower Amiga version or the considerably weaker portable versions on Game Gear and Game Boy. The 1994 3DO version was the real treat, however, featuring a truly 3D rendering system that – pre-PlayStation – was something of a technical achievement. Its cheesy live action video opening – even ▶

» There were five tracks each themed on specific Routes in California. As you progressed through the levels, these tracks became longer and harder.

» There's something immensely satisfying about taking a club to an opponent's head and watching them fall off their bike.

BIKER HEAVEN

The eight bikes that will make you king of the road

SHURIKEN 400

■ As the starting bike, you can imagine it wasn't particularly quick, but it at least was good for keeping you on the road and therefore a pretty easy bike to begin the game with.

SHURIKEN 1000

■ The heavy weight of this bike made it lumbersome to survive quicker, sharper turns: its speed often sending you off the track. Most favoured bikes with better accuracy.

PANDA 600

■ This was a bit of a vague upgrade, really, offering only a improvement to your starting bike in terms of power. For the cost, most players realised it was better to ignore it.

FERRUCI 850

■ The combination of high speed and great handling made this desirable, but you had to be good – it took skill to keep it on the track and couldn't handle very many crashes.

BANZAI 750

■ It's likely you'd have wanted this option when you reach the second level of stages. Its speed meant you could keep up, but it was tricky to maintain that speed around corners.

PANDA 750

■ The penultimate upgrade that only offered marginal improvements to speed and handling over the Ferruci 850. If you have the Ferruci, it was worth saving cash and ignoring this one.

KAMIKAZE 750

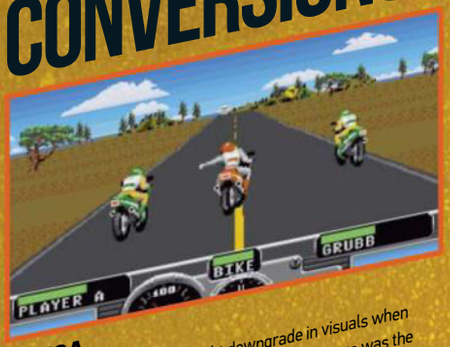
■ It was either the Banzai 750 or the Kamikaze 750, the latter of which was heavier and tough to get around corners. Acceleration was better, but you'd have to brake more to survive a race.

DIABLO 1000

■ The fastest, nimblest bike available but at an incredibly steep price. You wouldn't get this until later in the game, and even then you needed to be smart about braking to survive.

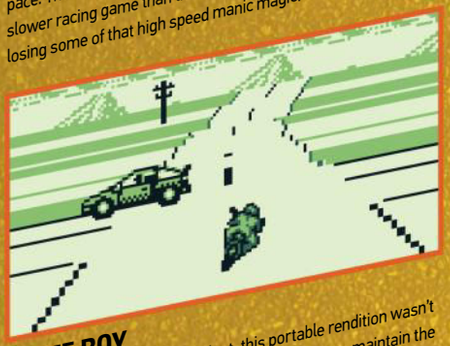
CONVERSIONS

Road Rash didn't just appear on Sega's Mega Drive…



AMIGA

■ Though there was only a slight downgrade in visuals when *Road Rash* was brought over to Amiga, the real issue was the pace. The mechanics remained as slick as ever, but it was a much slower racing game than the quick Mega Drive original – thus losing some of that high speed manic magic.

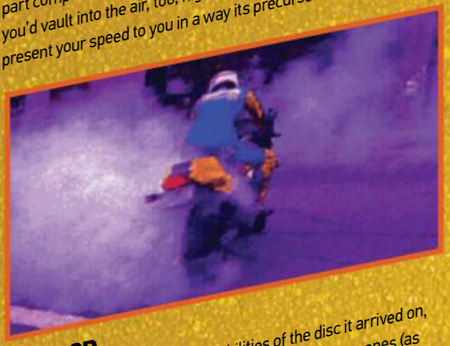


GAME BOY

■ Unlike its Game Gear equivalent, this portable rendition wasn't quite as enjoyable. It was understandably difficult to maintain the visuals on the Game Boy's monochrome screen, but worse still were the controls which made it extremely slow and unwieldy to play. This is one to avoid, if we're honest.

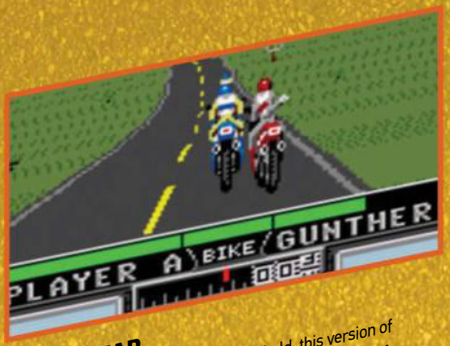
MASTER SYSTEM

■ For the most part, everything remained intact for the Master System version, but weaker visuals meant it didn't look the part compared to its more high-powered counterpart. Often you'd vault into the air, too, highlighting this version's inability to present your speed to you in a way its precursor had.



SEGA CD

■ By utilising the big storage capabilities of the disc it arrived on, the Sega CD version of *Road Rash* brought with it cutscenes (as was the case with many Sega CD games) and some improved visuals. There was even a set of backing tracks replacing the chiptune with drums, guitars and even vocals.



GAME GEAR

■ As you might expect for Sega's handheld, this version of *Road Rash* struggled to replicate that overall 3D design of its counterparts. It still maintained a very stable, solid core experience, though, and it was a commendable effort considering the limited hardware it was on.

3DO

■ For the effort involved this may well have been considered a sequel, but having been named simply '*Road Rash*' the distinguish is hard to make. It brought over the live action videos of the Sega CD version but added them to a whole new 3D engine that, for its time, was phenomenal and caused jaws to drop.

"By the time the 3DO version was ported to PC interest had already begun to wear thin"

ROAD RASH SEQUELS

Every game in the rough-and-tumble franchise

ROAD RASH II

■ The quick turnaround of this sequel – it came only a year after the original – meant that there wasn't much new to the experience; more bikes, more environments, the inclusion of split-screen multiplayer, and improvements to the menu navigation issues of the original meant this was about as complete a package as it needed to be. It also added the now-iconic chain weapon to the foray.

ROAD RASH 3: TOUR DE FORCE

■ Once again appearing on the Mega Drive – this time in 1995 – this version brought with it seven different locations across the world, upgradable bikes and a collection of different weapons – now eight in total – to round out the combat experience of the game by even allowing you to carry multiple weapons.

ROAD RASH 3D

■ This PlayStation game was more of an upgraded version of the 3DO version and maintained the sense of speed that the series had been known for. Combat was pared down slightly, but the stronger opponents meant that the brawling could go on for much longer. It lacked many fancy extras, but it got the experience just right.

» Police officers were a much bigger threat in later levels and – much like many of the AI rivals – differed in how aggressive they were.

replete with Soundgarden's *Rusty Cage* as a backing track – might've done enough to sell the concept to excited fans, but it was the in-game graphics that really blew players away.

By now there's probably something of a question to ask: *Road Rash* really was one of the better racing games of its time, so what happened to EA's stalwart motorbike game? Well the answer comes along with examples its brethren, too, the likes of *OutRun* and *Super Hang-On* that – ever since the Mega Drive – haven't really maintained the same success. EA, of course, made sequels to *Road Rash*, but the move to 3D was not particularly a good one for the series. *Road Rash II* arrived a year later on the Mega Drive with little more than a split-screen multiplayer feature – rather than the turn-by-turn method of the original – a handful of new bikes and a chain to use as a weapon. After that came *Road Rash 3: Tour De Force* in 1995, but again offered the same again, yet with different locations from across the world. By the time the 3DO version was ported to PC and a new 3D PS1 game was released in 1998, interest had already begun to wear thin and the new PlayStation era was a tough bridge for the series to cross. Crashes became impossible, instead you'd experience illogical ricochets after hitting a car or other obstacle, and while weapons would still feature, it became a much less important aspect to the franchise. The original *Road Rash* may well have been a product of its time, but its violence was as much its identity as its motorbikes. Sure, it was a simple addition to make – but it brought something completely new to the genre that would brand itself on the minds of Mega Drive owners everywhere. It is funny how a simple spot of violence can get gamers excited. ✱

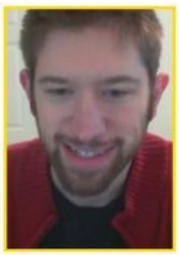
ROAD RASH 64

■ As impressive as the character and bike models had been for the N64 version, it still managed to look rather ugly – especially if you got out in front with nothing but the open road for company. Combat was especially weak here, while the driving itself didn't manage to achieve the right balance of speed and tactility.

ROAD RASH JAILBREAK

■ The PS1's *Jailbreak* offered much better visuals than its N64 equivalent, but a sort of silliness that the series hadn't really been known for. Combat remained weak, however, though it did allow for some power attacks that were fun to use. A GBA port was released, too, that actually provided an experience very similar to the original.

IAN FISCH How *Road Rash* inspired *Road Redemption*



What was it you enjoyed about *Road Rash*?
I think that what makes *Road Rash* great is that it's a combat game where the environment is constantly changing, as opposed to if you play most third-person combat games these days it seems like you're essentially in a flat arena, like a wrestling ring almost, and you just fight everyone and the environment doesn't really come into play. But with *Road Rash* the environment really determines what you can do to your opponents.

Do you think violence was a big factor for the game's enjoyment?
Yeah, I think violence is always a big factor when it comes to action games. I mean, I understand that it doesn't necessarily directly affect gameplay, but if you're playing *Call Of Duty*, if you're not getting that big reaction when you shoot someone with the blood spurt and the dramatic death and if, for instance, you shot a laser and they just blinked out of existence it would take a lot of the fun and satisfaction away. And I think *Road Rash* is the same way.

Why did you decide to try and reboot this type of game with *Road Redemption* now?
There are some games that you can remake right now and all the technological advances we've made in videogames and computers isn't going to make the game necessarily better. For instance, any game that is primarily in 2D. I guess *Sonic The Hedgehog* might be a good example; you can make a new version of *Sonic* using modern 3D graphics but it's not going to really be the same game, and it's not even necessarily going to be better than the originals in 2D. Whereas *Road Rash* was always something where the technology hadn't quite caught up to the game's vision, in terms of having realistic physics, having a lot of cars and riders on the road, in terms of being able to run competent AI with all that going on.

Did you replay the original for inspiration during development?
Absolutely. We used it as a reference – which parts of the series worked and which parts didn't. What worked is the ways you can have these engagements with other riders, and we realised that's a hard thing to do. The original 2D games had you strafing back and forward in the screen and your enemies kind of glued to your space, in the 3D versions it's easy to do that, which is why they didn't rely on combat.

THUNDER FORCE III
Hydra
This planet acts as an introduction to the game, with fairly weak enemies. It's designed around an ancient forest with heavy gun emplacements, and is guarded by the fire-breathing Gargoyle.
Ellis
The ice world of Ellis scrolls both horizontally and vertically, making it an exceptionally challenging stage. Enemies come thick and fast, and often from behind. It's guarded by the gigantic Mobile Fort.
Orn
The final planet isn't accessible until you've completed the others. It's a real ball-ache as well, consisting of three separate areas including a massive mothership called Cerebus and a final boss called ChaOs, found at the planet's core.
Gorgon
This small planet might look innocent, but it houses a deceptively tough level. Filled with lava and featuring lots of fire-based enemies, it requires a fair amount of skill to negotiate. Mechanical Twin Vulcans guard the exit.
Haides
One of the toughest levels in the game. This is due to ever-changing rock formations that can often lead to dead ends. Its guardian is the massive G Lobster, who is much weaker than he actually looks.
Seiren
The world of Seiren is largely aquatic, so you spend all your time underwater. Fortunately, this has no impact on your craft, letting you concentrate on the aquatic enemies and its King Fish boss.

With its stunning visuals, a rocking soundtrack and some gigantic bosses, it's little wonder that Technosoft's *Thunder Force III* is deemed to be one of the best games in the franchise. Usually cowering in the shadow of the equally magnificent *Thunder Force IV*, we've decided to once again penetrate the planet Orn and reveal why this excellent threequel is just as worthy of your time. Darran Jones is in the pilot seat and prepares to take his Fire LEO-03 Styx fighter to hell and back.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

Perfectly formed

Thunder Force III constantly gets ignored in favour of its epic sequel, but it remains an excellent game in its own right, and an important part of the franchise. It's beautifully paced, for starters, and has a number of interesting gameplay mechanics, challenging enemy waves and some genuinely entertaining bosses. It's also aesthetically amazing, for what is a relatively early Mega Drive release. Meticulous sprite design, a stunning soundtrack and some gorgeously designed levels all combine to create an excellent shooter that really needs to be experienced by anyone with even a casual interest in the genre.

Laser-spewing hell

Thunder Force III is packed with plenty of meaty weapons, from the homing power of the Hunter to the useful utility that is the rear shot. By far the most impressive, both in terms of use and aesthetic value, is the Sever laser. Once picked up and selected, it enables your ship to spew out huge bolts of energy that effortlessly slice through most enemies. Many feel that the laser is a little too powerful due to the ease with which you can use it to take down bosses, but due to the relentless assault you're faced with, keeping it until the end of a level is often an achievement in itself.

He's on fire

The stage designs are great throughout, but none compare to the brilliance of Gorgon. It's a cleverly constructed level that's packed with a variety of enemies but also features vicious rock outcrops that need to be avoided at all costs. It also speeds up at certain points, becoming a white-knuckle thrill ride that really takes your breath away. Best of all, though, are the sensational visuals, which show an undulating background representing the intense heat of the planet. It may not look as astonishing as it did in 1990, but it's still impressive enough to make you realise just how talented Technosoft was.

Déjà vu time

The only downside to boss encounters in *Thunder Force III* is that they're a little too easy, even if they retain some excellent designs. While we've a soft spot for the huge G Lobster found on Haides and Gorgon's Twin Vulcan, our favourite boss is actually Cerebus, a massive mothership discovered after defeating the first five planets. In addition to being packed with lasers and cannons, it launches waves of enemy ships at you. You finally defeat it by flying inside it and taking out its core. Yes, it's just a rip-off of *R-Type*'s third stage, but rarely has it been aped as well as it has been here.

Stay for the credits

Technosoft is well-regarded for its superb chiptune scores, and it really pushed the boat out with *Thunder Force III*. Many of the compositions are suitably manic and fast-paced, easily re-creating the frenetic action seen on-screen, but the best tune is saved for the ending. After your flight from planet Orn and a truly bonkers plot summary, the triumphant tune shifts to become a melancholic little ditty that's perfectly themed to the scenes of your fighter docking his ship and celebrating with his friends as the credits run. It's a truly fitting, moving ending to an excellent shoot-'em-up.

Stick with the original

Thunder Force III proved so popular that Technosoft released it in arcades as *Thunder Force AC* several months after its debut. Haides and Ellis were replaced, the difficulty was upped, and the status bar and autofire option were removed. Its audio is also weaker. This version was ported to the SNES as *Thunder Spirits* and again featured several changes, including a new mothership. Its biggest issue, though, is that it is hampered by slowdown throughout, due to the SNES's slower processor. Our advice is to stick with the original, unless you fancy the stiffer challenge of the arcade version.

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** TECHNOSOFT
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **RELEASED:** 1990
- **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

What the press said... ages ago

Mean Machines

"There's no denying that the [graphics] remain superb, and the sound is pretty good, but it's playability that counts, and though *Thunder Force* is good, it could have been better."

Allgame.com

"Shooter fans will love the inventive weaponry, variety of creatures, cleverly designed levels and intensity. *Thunder Force III* outdoes *Thunder Force II* and is far superior to [*Thunder Spirits*]."

What we think

You can argue that *Thunder Force IV* cranks everything up to 11, but *III* feels more pure. Yes, it's a little easy, but that just allows you to marvel at its excellent and imaginative enemies. After over 20 years, it shows no sign of ageing.

why you must PLAY

Publisher: Sega
Developer: Techno Soft
Released: 1989
Genre: Strategy shooter

HERZOG ZWEI

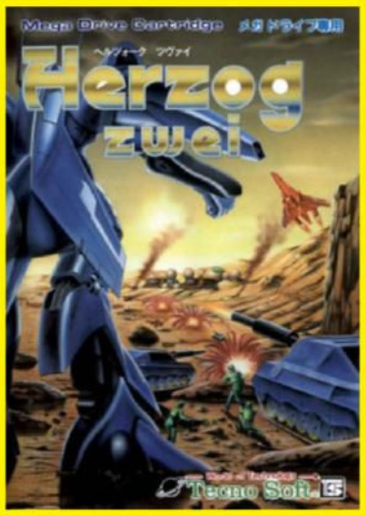
WE ARE RELENTLESS IN OUR QUEST TO UNEARTH HIDDEN VIDEOGAMING GEMS FOR YOUR PERUSAL. AS A RESULT, WE DUSTED OFF OUR MEGA DRIVE, FIRED UP ONE OF THE MOST UNDERRATED GAMES OF ALL TIME AND CHALLENGED THE PRECONCEPTION THAT THE JAPANESE JUST 'DON'T DO' REAL TIME STRATEGY...

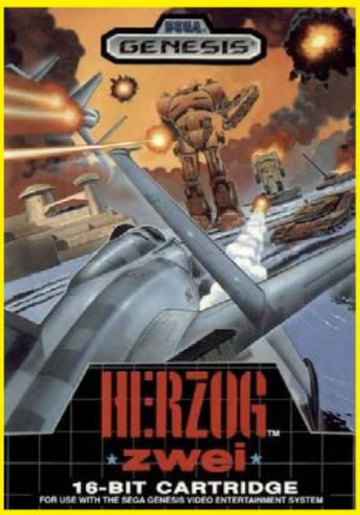
DUKE IT OUT

In the late Eighties, 'strategy' games were predominantly turn-based affairs with grid-like maps. The concept of having two entire armies facing off and carrying out commands in real time was deemed too demanding for gaming machines of the era (and possibly players). *Herzog*, released on the MSX home computer in 1988, changed that perception. Heralded as a 'real time combat simulation' by Techno Soft, *Herzog* was graphically crude and rather basic in execution but it would lay the groundwork for the Mega Drive sequel.

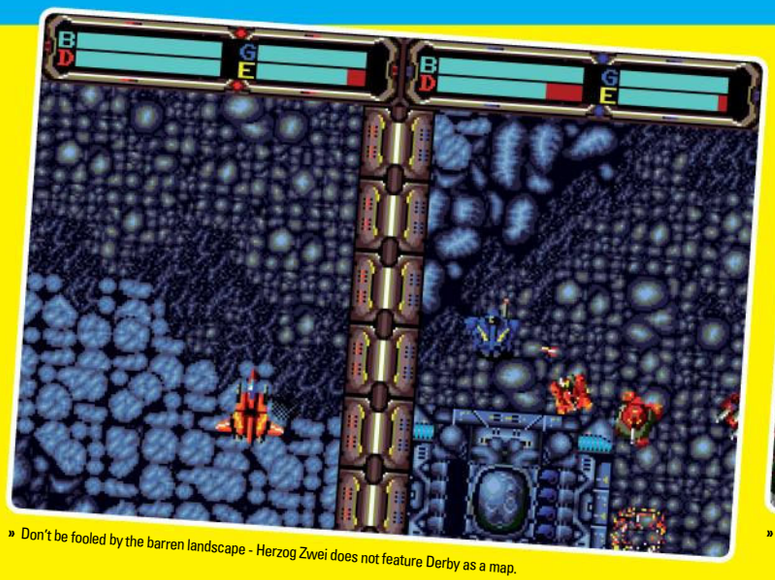
If you asked the average gamer which company they think should be credited with creating the Real Time Strategy (RTS) genre as we know it today, they would most likely respond with 'Westwood Studios', thanks to the tremendous worldwide success of its *Dune* and *Command & Conquer* franchises. However, it would be the wrong answer. The company responsible for laying down the blueprint of the modern RTS is not American, but Japanese – and rather ironically it's better known for its mindless (yet enjoyable) shoot-'em-up releases than its methodical strategy games. Tecno Soft (or Techno Soft as it was known in the West) is a moniker most people will instantly associate with the sublime *Thunder Force* franchise. When *Thunder Force II*, one of its earliest Mega Drive releases, was published in Japan in 1989 alongside an obscure title called *Herzog Zwei* (German for "Duke 2"), it was unsurprising that it received the lion's share of the attention (not to mention sales) and went on to spawn two successful sequels on Sega's 16-bit console. However, it could be argued that *Herzog Zwei* left a more indelible impression – it gave birth to a whole new genre.

The basic premise will be familiar to every RTS fan – two armies clash with the mutual aim of wiping each other off the face of one of the eight different world maps. Unlike

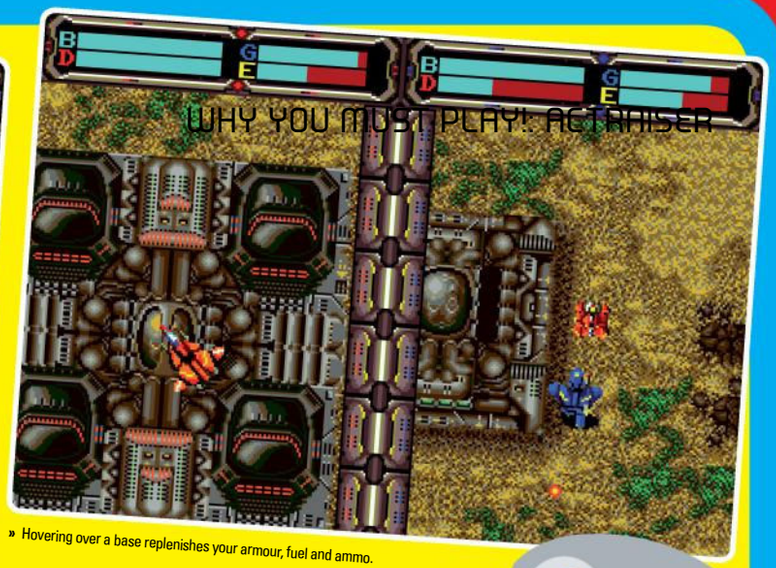




» As always the Japanese boxart (seen on the right) looks far superior to the US effort (far right).



» Don't be fooled by the barren landscape - Herzog Zwei does not feature Derby as a map.



» Hovering over a base replenishes your armour, fuel and ammo.

most strategy titles, *Herzog Zwei* limits you to exclusive control of just one unit – an incredibly cool mech that can morph into a jet fighter at the touch of a button. There are additional units to construct and these range from foot soldiers to massive tanks and gun emplacements. These units have to be manufactured (which costs both money and time) and issued with instruction programs that determine how they will behave when sent into the field of battle. Assigning instructions is made easier by the use of self-explanatory icons – if you were one of those people who happened to find the Japanese version in your Christmas stocking, this came as a godsend. Although initially it all appears complex (a fact that has no doubt dissuaded many players from persevering with it over the years), it soon becomes second nature. Once you're familiar with the units available and understand which command does what, there really is nothing else to it – however (as is the case with many things in life) *Herzog Zwei* takes a moment to learn but a lifetime to master.

"LIKE MANY THINGS, HERZOG ZWEI TAKES A MOMENT TO LEARN BUT A LIFETIME TO MASTER"

The single-player campaign provides a decent level of challenge and offers ample opportunities to brush up your basic skills and develop tactics, but once a few hours have been invested it becomes too easy to exploit obvious flaws in the CPU intelligence. As with so many games of this type, *Herzog Zwei* only really springs to life in two-player mode – nothing compares to the excitement of competing against a human opponent of equivalent skill. Battles can last for hours as each player assembles their forces, captures bases, loses bases, regroups and starts their offensive anew. To put it bluntly, *Herzog Zwei* is one of the most breathtakingly brilliant multi-player experiences you're ever likely to witness on Sega's 16-bit console and certainly one of the most innovative strategy titles in recent memory.

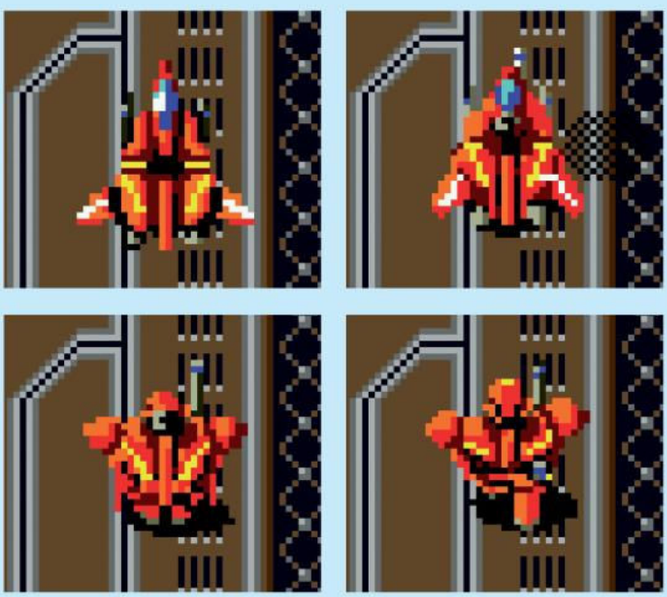
Unit deployment is simplicity itself – once the unit is constructed and ready, all you have to do is hover your plane over a friendly base and pick it up. Then the piece can be airlifted to any point on the map (so long as you don't run out of fuel – an event which results in you being returned to HQ – you never actually 'die' in the game) and dropped into position. Even in the heat of battle, you have the ability to pick up your forces and relocate them. So although 'complete' control of each unit is never granted (as was the case in Westwood's games), you're still able to redistribute your forces and plan new tactics 'on the fly'. A special mention must be made regarding your avatar on the field of battle – the transforming robot/jet plane. Serving as both mouse pointer and an offensive weapon in its own right, the use of the mech is one of the main factors that sets *Herzog Zwei* apart from subsequent RTS titles. It allows the player to participate

REMEMBER WHEN?

Nothing beats the feeling of victory and in *Herzog Zwei* winning against a human opponent is very sweet indeed. You never forget your first triumph over a fellow carbon-based life form…

MAGICAL MOMENT

If you're a child of the Eighties then you'll probably have an affinity to Hasbro's *Transformers* franchise. Therefore, the appeal of controlling a giant robot will need no explanation. The first time you play *Herzog Zwei*, you will spend the first ten minutes pressing 'A' in order to witness the transformation sequence and hear the sound effect that accompanies it.



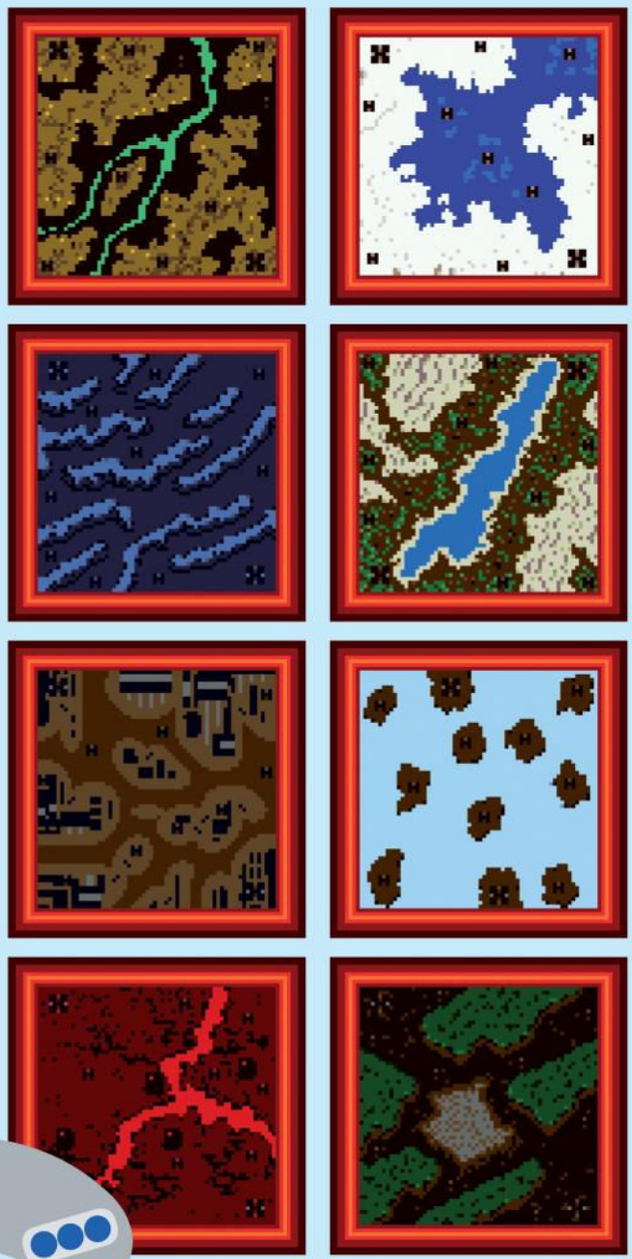
why you must PLAY

» That yellow marker shows an incoming missle - lummie!

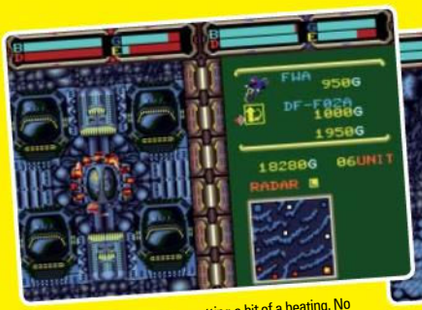
» The 'SOS' sign indicates your HQ is under enemy fire - cripes!

MAPS

There are eight different stages in *Herzog Zwei*. Each one has different characteristics, which will affect your battle tactics accordingly.



"SUCCESS IN HERZOG ZWEI DEPENDS ON CONTROLLING THE VARIOUS NEUTRAL BASES SCATTERED ACROSS THE MAP"



» Red reforms at HQ after getting a bit of a beating. No doubt it will be more careful next time…

» Sadly, 'Go Faster Stripes' are not an optional extra when building armoured cars.

in the melee rather than just sit passively as friendly units find themselves on the wrong end of a beating. If the tide of battle turns against your forces, there's the option to fly into the thick of things and vaporize a few of those hostiles personally.

Although ultimate victory is gained via the destruction of your rival's headquarters, success in *Herzog Zwei* depends largely on controlling the various neutral bases that are scattered across the map. Foot soldiers, when given a specific 'occupy' order, will proceed to the nearest neutral or enemy base and enter it. Once four units have been sent in, it falls under your control. Not only does this grant additional funds with which to construct forces (money is drip-fed into your war chest every few seconds – the more bases you own, the amount of cash you receive in each 'top-up' increases), it also means that the base can serve as an outpost where you can collect newly built units, restock your fuel and ammo and use as a rally point to launch attacks on the opposing HQ. Because all units in the game only have a finite amount of fuel and ammo (including your mech), control of these bases is vital. In order to stage an effective offensive it is important that a foothold is established close enough to permit a sustained assault. Even when a base is occupied, it doesn't mean it will remain that way – your rival can send in their units to reduce the tally and eventually occupy it.

» The handy 'ok' handsign means a unit is constructed and ready for pickup.

» The Red Commander attempts to stop the Blue army from occupying a neutral base.

THE UNITS

INFANTRY (FOOT SOLDIER)
These are the basic grunts. They have weak firepower and poor armour, but are vital to your army as they are the only unit that can occupy bases.

FWA (MOTORCYCLE SCOUT)
Has much the same firepower as a foot soldier, but these guys are seriously nippy. Handy for drawing out enemy forces.

ARM-51D (ARMOURED CAR)
This is rendered largely pointless by the Tank, though these units are still handy if you need to keep enemy soldiers at bay.

TAX-52 (TANK)
Strong armour and excellent firepower at the expense of speed, but you'll be relying on these guys to perform most of your offensive manoeuvres.

SAM-42 (SURFACE-TO-AIR UNIT)
These are designed specifically to attack the enemy commander's plane. The missiles lock-on and a few hits are lethal.

GMR-34A (GUN EMPLACEMENT)
The most powerful unit in the game, but there's a catch – it can't move. Also features anti-air capabilities.

ST-57U (BOAT)
These possess a decent degree of firepower, but can only be used on levels where there's water, which is obvious, as it's a boat.

SUPPLY (SUPPLY TRUCK)
These units have absolutely no offensive capability whatsoever; their purpose is exclusively to refuel and re-arm units in the field.

THE PROGRAMS

BDF-1SD (OVERWATCH)

Unit does not move, and attacks only when an enemy comes within range.

AF-001A (PATROL)

Unit will move in a patrol circle and attack any enemy forces that it encounters.

AT-101 (APPROACH BASE)

Unit will head towards the nearest neutral/enemy base and wait there until it is occupied.

AT-101H (OCCUPY)

This means a unit will enter the nearest neutral/enemy base. (Infantry only).

DF-F02A (PURSUE AND ENGAGE)

Unit will remain stationary until an enemy unit approaches, it will then pursue until it either destroys it or the enemy escapes.

BA-001C (ATTACK HQ)

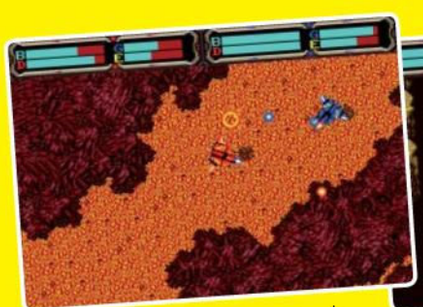
Unit will set off to attack the enemy HQ – this is probably the most important command in the game – without it, you can't win.

PW-SS10 (SUPPLY)

This command is only available to the supply truck. The truck will provide aid to any units that need fuel or ammo.

Because the game is unashamedly unconventional and difficult to pigeon-hole (being neither a shooter or an out-and-out turn based strategy title), it sold poorly when it was released and was quickly forgotten in favour of games which offered more immediate gratification (ironically, games like the aforementioned Tecno Soft stable mate *Thunder Force II*). American magazine Electronic Gaming Monthly gave it one of the lowest ratings for a Mega Drive/Genesis title (at the time) – a clear indication that the contemporary press were just as baffled as the general public (although it must be mentioned that EGM recently reassessed their stance and named it as one of their all-time favourite games). Tecno Soft's pedigree worked against it too – as *Herzog Zwei* featured shooter-elements, people judged it as such and they obviously came away sorely disappointed. It could be argued that the game only saw the light of day in the West because it was completely free of Japanese text and was released early in the Mega Drive's life – traditionally this is when most unusual Japanese games have the best chance of being localized due to the limited amount of software available.

Commercial failure aside it's startling that no developer, not even Tecno Soft itself (now sadly departed), has ever tried to improve on what is a near-flawless gaming concept. It's possible to pick up a second-hand Mega Drive and a copy of the game for a reasonable amount, so there really is no excuse not to experience this fantastic piece of software. *Herzog Zwei* is one of the most essential multi-player titles ever released, and quite simply deserves to be played.



» The two commanders clash over some hot lava, the loser will really feel the heat. Ouch!

» You can construct units and check the map using the status screen.

» Pausing the game presents you with a map and plenty of useful information.

COMIX ZONE™
THE TAIL END OF A CONSOLE'S LIFE CAN OFTEN PRODUCE ITS MOST UNDERRATED GAMES, AND THE MEGA DRIVE WAS NO EXCEPTION. GRAEME MASON CHATS TO SOME KEY PERSONNEL BEHIND THE INNOVATIVE AND IDIOSYNCRATIC COMIX ZONE...
WELCOME TO MY WORLD
INSIDE HIS STUDIO FLAT, SKETCH IS WORKING ON HIS LATEST CREATION AS ROADKILL LOOKS ON
NEW YORK CITY, PRESENT DAY

I'M GENERAL ALISSA CYAN. YOUR NAME?
THE EVER-SO-SLIGHTLY STEREOTYPICAL KUNG-FUNG AND HIS EVER-SO-LONG FINGERNAILS.
GENERAL ALISSA CYAN OFFERS HELP AND GUIDANCE THROUGHOUT SKETCH'S ADVENTURE.

While there was indisputably still life in the old girl, by 1995 the Sega Mega Drive was starting to look a little worn around the edges. Sony had entered the games console market with its grey behemoth, the PlayStation, while Sega itself had unleashed its 32-bit successor to the Mega Drive, the Saturn. All told, it wasn't the best time to release a new Mega Drive game, even one as exceptional and original as *Comix Zone*. Yet actually the idea for the game had originated way back in 1992, when Sega Technical Institute (STI) designer Peter Morawiec, while working with Team Sonic on *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* and *Sonic Spinball*, created a concept video for an intriguing idea he had. "I grew up in Czechoslovakia and loved comic books when I could get them," says Peter, "although it was mostly European fare such as *Asterix* and *Tintin*." After emigrating to the United States in 1989, Peter suddenly found himself surrounded by many avid comic book fans. "I ended up getting introduced to all the major franchises and it was at that time that inspiration struck." That inspiration was to create a videogame around the tale of a comic book artist, trapped within the weird alternate dimension of his own comic, complete with a gameplay mechanic that saw the player progressing through a set of comic book panels. It was a highly visual idea, and one that the newly-arrived Czechoslovakian lad, not entirely fluent in English, didn't fancy describing to a room full of Sega executives.

> "I WANTED TO MAKE A BEAT-'EM-UP ACTION GAME WITH A STRONG SENSE OF ADVENTURE"
>
> Peter Morawiec, designer

Peter swiftly realised that he needed to visualise his concept if he was to stand a chance of getting the idea green lit. Enlisting the help of his trusty Commodore Amiga, he created *Joe Pencil Trapped In The Comix Zone*, the tale of an angular artist ensnared in his own comic book. "I wanted to make a beat-'em-up action game with a strong sense of adventure and as you can see from the concept video, while the character design changed, the overall premise and mechanics remained fairly intact." Indeed, the plot to the final game would echo the original concept in many ways: the player took control of Sketch Turner, a comic book artist transported into the pages of his own creation by super-villain Mortus. Sketch must travel within the confines of individual comic book frames, fighting off the nefarious mutant army and solving traps, often with assistance from his trusty companion – a pet rat charmingly called Roadkill. The game would not only require skilful coding and compression, but also some persuasion if it were to pass the Sega board.

"STI was presenting a handful of concepts to Sega's executives," explains Peter, "and it was a fairly formal setting. So as I wasn't super-fluent in English, I used the video to do most of the talking. Luckily Sega's then-president, Tom Kalinske, liked it very much." Someone else who liked the idea was Roger Hector, vice-president of the STI. "Peter had put together what I thought was an excellent video demo and I absolutely *loved* it!" says Roger enthusiastically.

SUDDENLY A BOLT OF LIGHTNING STRIKES AND AN ARM JUMPS OUT OF THE PAGE AND GRABS SKETCH
BUT I'LL BE FREE SOON ENOUGH...
UNFORTUNATELY FOR SKETCH, MORTUS HAS A NEFARIOUS PLAN
AND THE ARTIST IS TRANSPORTED INTO THE WORLD OF COMIX ZONE
MORTUS, SKETCH'S MASTER VILLAIN IS IN OUR WORLD! AND HE'S NOT HAPPY!
I'M JUST A DRAWING

SKETCH HAS A SNOWY ADVENTURE IN THE HIMALAYAS.
TRACKING THE DEADLY MUTANT HIDEOUT.
"THEY" HAVE HIDEOUT RIGHT HERE IN THE CITY

"He did a great job of mocking up the visual gameplay in the video and his passion and clarity of vision was undeniable. I put it on our list of 'good ideas to come back to when we have a chance.'"

Unfortunately that chance did not arise for some time. The Sega Technical Institute famously incorporated Sonic Team, the designers and programmers behind the iconic *Sonic The Hedgehog* series. While these games were under development, there was little scope for other projects. "But we wanted to make it happen," continues Roger, "and I loved *Comix Zone*'s basic concept for its uniqueness and sharp visual style. Using a comic book page gave a natural organisation to visually suggest progress and create strategy in the game."

Working at STI was British programmer Adrian Stephens, who had previously collaborated with Roger Hector on the Disney game *Stunt Island*. "Roger asked me to join him at STI to start working on the next generation of Sega consoles," remembers Adrian, "but after I arrived it turned out the new console would not be available to start work on for over a year. So I wanted to work on a Genesis title to keep myself occupied until then." Roger suggested Adrian speak to a certain young Czechoslovakian designer and have a look at his game concept video. "I loved it!" says Adrian, echoing Roger's own reaction. "And it immediately reminded me of the music video *Take On Me* by A-ha." Peter himself acknowledges the influence the video had on *Comix Zone*, citing it as a 'strong reference point'.

As technical director of the STI, Adrian programmed all aspects of *Comix Zone* and wrote the tools for extracting sprites and background graphics. "The first thing I worked on was a way to swap graphics in and out of video memory on the fly," recalls Adrian, "speculatively decompressing parts as it went. This was important for the visual style of the game which didn't rely on repeating tiles." Not wishing to be restricted by a limited colour palette, Adrian also developed a system of speedily switching colours during the horizontal sync, allowing for impressive effects such as rippling water. "But it was hard work to get the timing right for it to look good." he grimaces. And of course, these being the last days of the cartridge-based games console (unless you were Nintendo), memory was always an issue. "Actually, a lot of our technical development was just about how we could cram everything into 16 megabits," says Adrian, "so everything was heavily compressed although the limited RAM – 64k – meant not much could be decompressed at a time."

Designer Peter Morawiec was involved all the way through

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **DEVELOPER:** SEGA TECHNICAL INSTITUTE
- **RELEASED:** 1995
- **PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE, PC
- **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP

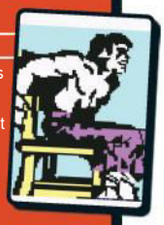
COMIC BOOK ADAPTATIONS

Classic paper heroes who went digital

QUESTPROBE TRILOGY

ADVENTURE INTERNATIONAL, 1984

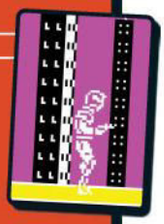
■ Adventure games may not be in vogue today, but back in 1984 this trio of Marvel-themed graphic text adventures from Scott Adams proved very popular. Featuring Spider-Man, The Hulk and double act Human Torch and Thing, their success could not prevent Adventure International's bankruptcy a year later. This unfortunately meant a fourth entry, based around the X-Men, never saw the light of day.



JUDGE DREDD

MELBOURNE HOUSE, 1986

■ Arguably the UK's most famous comic character, Judge Dredd has inspired several videogames, starting with this somewhat insipid effort from Melbourne House. Oft-delayed and ultimately disappointing, the game still managed to portray many elements of the grim comic with accuracy such as Dredd's Lawgiver boasting alternate firing options.



BATMAN: THE CAPED CRUSADER

OCEAN, 1988

■ Programmer Jon Ritman and Ocean had already given us a slightly portly version of Batman in 1986, although it's arguable whether, despite the authentic front cover, it was based on the comic or the Sixties TV show. However, this superb 1988 update featuring *Comix Zone*-like comic book panels and speech bubbles left you in no doubt as to its origins.

X-MEN

KONAMI, 1992

■ Not to be confused with *X-Men: Children Of The Atom*, which was released two years later by Capcom, this Konami arcade machine from 1992 saw the player take control of one of the titular mutants against the minions and might of the evil Magneto. It wasn't the most complex of games, but with each character boasting individual powers, was certainly fun to play.

SAM & MAX HIT THE ROAD

LUCASARTS, 1993

■ Released by indie publisher Fishwrap Productions in 1987, Steve Purcell's *Sam & Max: Freelance Police*, the tale of an anthropomorphic dog and rabbit detective agency, quickly became a cult hit amongst comic book fans. Six years later, LucasArts (for whom Purcell was now working) gave its creator the chance to develop a game using *Maniac Mansion*'s legendary SCUMM engine.

ROBOCOP VS THE TERMINATOR

VIRGIN, 1994

■ Based on the Frank Miller crossover comic by Dark Horse, Virgin returned to comic-book adaptations with this dark and violent arcade platformer based on David Perry's Mega Drive engine. Unable to use any actual material from the comic, programmer John Botti and designer Tim Williams studied one of their favourite games, *Contra III*, to give the game its playable sheen.

SPIDER-MAN AND VENOM: MAXIMUM CARNAGE

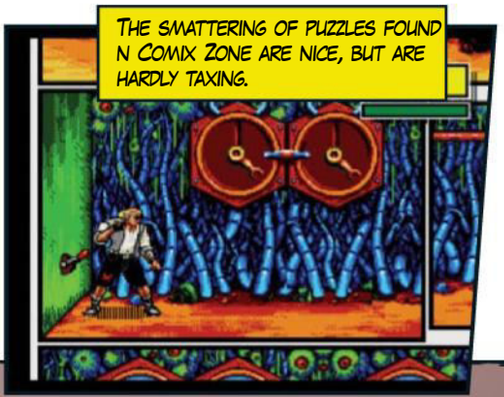
LJN/ACCLAIM, 1994

■ Spider-Man's alien alter ego, Venom, had become a popular character since his introduction in the 1984 *Secret Wars* comic book miniseries. It took ten years for this popularity to be translated into videogame form with this fun brawler on the SNES and Mega Drive; think *Streets Of Rage 2* with web-slinging and wall-climbing.

SKETCH ACROBATICALLY LEAPS BETWEEN THE PANELS.
SKETCH IS RARELY SHORT OF AN AMUSING QUIP.
FURTHER ALONG
MAN, I HATE SEAFOOD!
SAVE ALISSA AND SHE'S TRANSPORTED INTO THE REAL WORLD. HOORAY!

development. "I felt it was my baby and tried to contribute as much as possible: character designs, level layouts, gameplay feature design and even some AI scripting," he says, also recalling the restrictions of the cartridge. "I initially envisioned much more variety within the panels of the comic book, but we ultimately had to curtail those ambitions due to memory limitations. As a result, there are a number of repeating tile graphics throughout each page." And being a fan of the Amiga demo scene, Peter was keen to incorporate considerable graphical pizazz to highlight the comic book environment. "We tried to squeeze in as many effects as possible," he says, highlighting in particular the impressive writing hand on the boot-up screen and the rolling page graphic, noting "Adrian did wonders to achieve that page curl."

Technical issues and memory restrictions aside, there was another problem during the development of *Comix Zone* that, while not entirely 'unexpected', could have caused some major issues. "A big issue came late in the process when Adrian had to relocate to southern California and finish the game away from STI," remembers Roger Hector, "but he miraculously made it work out." The reason for such a move? We'll let Adrian himself explain. "The reason for the move wasn't actually so sudden," he smiles, "as there was nine months warning! My then-girlfriend, and now wife, was having our baby and our long-distance relationship needed to become a little shorter!" Adrian managed to postpone the move for as long as he could, meaning it ultimately had little effect on the development of *Comix Zone* apart from perhaps a little loss of focus when it came to the final round of testing. And more importantly, the coder made it to Santa Monica the day before his girlfriend gave birth.



> **"I AM QUITE SURE IT WOULD HAVE DONE MUCH BETTER HAD IT BEEN RELEASED [EARLIER]"** Roger Hector

Inevitably, *Comix Zone* clearly suffered because of its elongated development schedule. "We secured Sega's sign-off in late 1992," recalls Peter, "but couldn't begin development until after completing *Sonic Spinball* in early 1994." As if this was not delay enough, when marketing and quality control deemed *Comix Zone* to be too short, development slipped into 1995 as the team tweaked the difficulty level. "The game's difficulty has always been a gripe of mine," bemoans Peter, "as while many gamers seemed to love that aspect of the game, I always felt it prevented more people from experiencing it fully. A save feature would have helped, but it was considered an expensive luxury back then. It was just a fairly long and challenging project development-wise." And speaking of deficiencies in the game, Peter recalls struggling to wrestle all the story elements together. "I remember getting stumped with the script as it unfolded throughout the levels. I had all the locations and individual features in my head but struggled to link it all together. It was all rather paper-thin," he jokes before adding: "In retrospect we probably should have hired a writer to help with the speech bubbles at least – but this wasn't the norm back then."

Sales of *Comix Zone* were good, but not stellar. Would it have succeeded more at the beginning of the Mega Drive's life? "I am quite sure it would have done much better had it been released then," says Roger Hector, who remained a supporter and driving force behind the game right until the end. "At the beginning of a console's life is when new and unlicensed ideas could be tried and do very well. When a platform is winding down, it isn't such a good time." Yet despite their reservations, all who were involved on *Comix Zone* have very fond memories of Sketch's adventures. "I was very happy that, despite everything, the game stayed true to its original concept – and was fun," says Roger.

Lead programmer Adrian Stephens agrees. "I felt we'd achieved what we'd set out to and it was as technically good as we could make it. Response to the game was great, but we were very aware if it had been released even a year earlier, it might have achieved much more financial success. But it was a great experience nonetheless."

Comix Zone turned out to be not just a swansong for the Mega Drive, but also the Sega Technical Institute itself. "STI had created a satellite office for Peter and I in Burbank where we worked on a Saturn *Sonic* game for a while," says Adrian. One day, they received a call from Roger Hector telling them he'd been let go by Sega. "We saw the writing on the wall and rather than waiting for the inevitable, Peter and I voluntarily left to start up our own company." But despite this sad end to the story of *Comix Zone*, for him personally, producer Roger Hector has nothing but praise for the game itself. "Comix Zone was a hidden jewel, a strong concept from start to finish and the team did a brilliant job of execution. Of the 100-plus games I've been involved with, it remains to this day one of my favourites."

Our thanks to Peter Morawiec, Roger Hector, Adrian Stephens and Howard Drossin for their time.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2 (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1992

KID CHAMELEON
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1992

THE OOZE
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1995

THE SOUND OF COMIX ZONE

Musical Director at the Sega Technical Institute was Howard Drossin, who created the music and sound effects for all of the new games made there. "I think it was a pretty brief conversation that I had with Peter, and it turned out that we were both thinking the same thing for *Comix Zone*: pop-based grunge rock." As well as providing the music and sound to the game, Howard also contributed the voice of Sketch and the Elvis-esque "Sega" on its logo screen. And when it was suggested that he create a six-track CD soundtrack to go with the PAL release he jumped at it. "I put the band together by calling a few friends I knew in LA. It was an unusual thing to do in those days and I thought it was really cool that Sega allotted budget for it." Howard named his band Roadkill, after Sketch's pet rat, and arranged some of the music in the game. "For me it still ranks as one of my favourite projects. I'm proud of what I was able to get out of the chip!"

Flashback

Instant Expert

***Flashback* was first** released on the Amiga in 1992. It was spread across four disks.

***Flashback* is the** brainchild of Paul Cuisset. In addition to coming up with the game's concept, he also wrote, directed, designed and helped program the game.

***Flashback* currently holds** the Guinness World Record for being the bestselling French game of all time.

Due to its popularity, *Flashback* received a sequel that was released in 1996. *Fade To Black* was only available on the PC and PSone, and was vastly different to its predecessor.

***Flashback* was also** due for release on Nintendo's Game Boy Advance. Developed by Adeline Software, the port featured a brand new plot and many new locations. A leaked beta ROM is available online.

The PC DOS version has an extended cut-scene sequence that wasn't in other versions of the game.

US Gold released *Flashback* in Europe and North America. In Japan, publishing duties fell to Sunsoft.

US versions of the Mega Drive, Mega-CD and Super Nintendo games came with a Marvel comic that explained much of Conrad's back story.

Utilising the same motion-capture techniques that made Jordan Mechner's Prince Of Persia such a success, Flashback introduced the world to Conrad B Heart and another delicious slice of French gaming. We take the Mega Drive outing for a spin...

Many people think that *Flashback* is the sequel to *Another World*. It isn't, but we can certainly see why these comparisons are made. Both games use cut-scenes to advance their stories, both take place on strange alien worlds, they were both published by Delphine, and both benefit from truly glorious rotoscoped animation.

The similarities end there, though, and while *Flashback* certainly feels familiar if you've ever played Eric Chahi's game, it's a totally different and far more ambitious beast.

Indeed, what impresses you about *Flashback* is the sheer amount of variety and scale that it offers you. One minute you're platforming through a gorgeous-looking jungle, the next you're negotiating the new-age subways of Titan, taking part in a game show akin to *The Running Man* and exploring an alien planet. It's a huge, impressive monster of a game that was so grand in scope that at one stage it was pitched as a "CD-ROM game on a cartridge".

First released on the Amiga in 1992, it immediately won rave reviews due to its cinematic cut-scenes, breathtaking animation and varied gameplay. It was quickly ported to all manner of computers and home consoles, ranging from Sega's Mega Drive to the FM Towns and Atari's Jaguar, and it remains highly regarded by anyone who's been fortunate enough to play it.

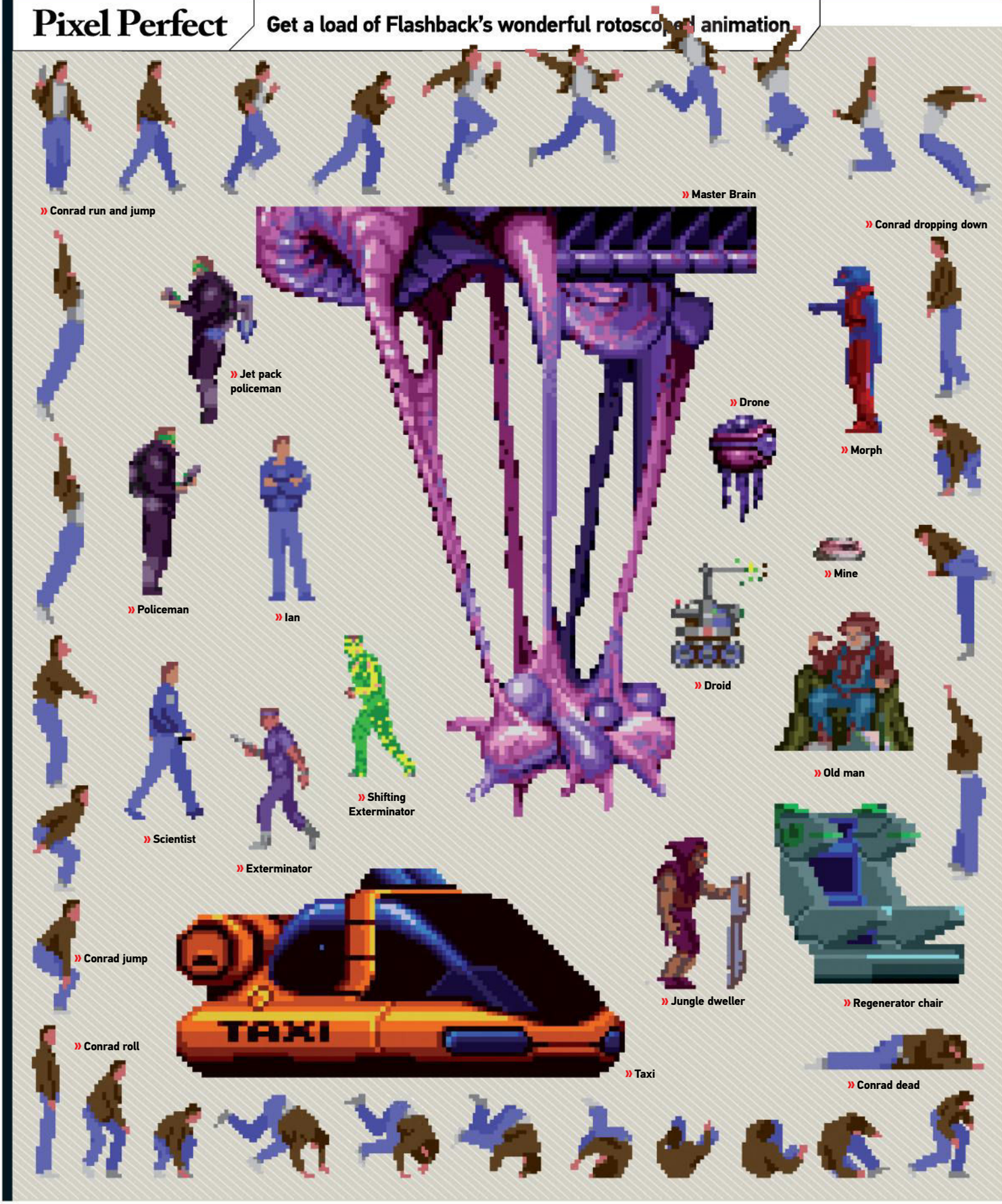
Flashback tells the story of Conrad B Heart, an agent who has to recover his lost memory when he discovers that aliens are living in his world and disguising themselves as government officials, plotting to destroy Earth. After being captured in *Flashback*'s epic opening and subsequently escaping, Conrad must recover his precious memories – don't worry; he kept them conveniently safe – and save the world.

It's showtime!

Yes, it takes elements from numerous movies of the time – most notably the aforementioned *The Running Man* and the excellent *They Live* – but Conrad's tale still feels refreshingly different, effortlessly building on the story structure that Jordan Mechner carefully created for his *Prince Of Persia*. It also feels suitably epic, with most levels beginning with larger-than-life cut-scenes that forward Conrad's plight and keep the player absolutely enthralled with what's happening on screen. Again, it's not a new mechanic for videogames and had been utilised to similar great effect in 1991's *Another World*, and yet somehow

Pixel Perfect

Get a load of Flashback's wonderful rotoscoped animation



Critical Reception

What the gaming press thought...

"It's challenging, entertaining, thoroughly addictive, and it looks better than any random sequence from Cindy Crawford's workout video."

- **AMIGA POWER** ISSUE 25

Twin Galaxies High Scores

Interestingly, there are no current high scores for *Flashback* on Twin Galaxies. Categories exist for both time trials (NTSC and PAL versions) and overall high scores, so let's see if a reader can set a new record for one of them.

Flashback just felt more filmic, possibly due to it riffing so heavily on those previously mentioned movies.

Even with its cinematic cut-scenes, it's *Flashback*'s riveting gameplay and sheer variety that last longest in the memory and will keep you playing through to its impressive end. Waking up in one of Titan's jungles, the first stage of *Flashback* is little more than an excuse to test your abilities and get used to Conrad's amazing athleticism. Utilising the same rotoscoping techniques that worked so well in *Prince Of Persia* – clearly a major inspiration given the number of similarities – and *Another World*, Conrad B Heart is an absolute joy to watch in motion, effortlessly climbing and leaping around the large game world. There are certainly moments that feel occasionally clunky – drawing your gun, for example, or making certain jumps – but even their limitations rarely ruin Conrad's breathtaking animation.

After negotiating the tricky platform-heavy jungle the gameplay becomes a little more sedate, with Conrad travelling to New Washington and having to earn a work permit – six years before Ryo started working on the docks in *Shenmue* – in order to earn entry to the charmingly named *Death Tower*, a *Running Man*-styled show – there's that comparison again – that allows the survivor to win a free pass to Earth. Here the gameplay becomes more action-oriented, with Conrad having to climb several levels that are swarming with enemies. Upon reaching Earth the exploration opens up yet again, until Conrad eventually finds himself transported to the alien planet of the Morphs. Several moments of extreme heroism later and the game ends with not only a nod to Ridley Scott's *Alien*, but also the prospect that all your hard work has been for nothing. Fortunately, a sequel eventually appeared in the form of *Fade To Black*.

It's frustratingly hard in places, with the controls not always feeling like they're keeping up with Conrad, but the end result is a timeless platform adventure that, like the best of wines, just keeps getting better with age.

» Whether dystopian sci-fi cities or lush jungles, *Flashback* manages to look spectacular.

The Devices

Conrad finds devices throughout his adventure that offer new abilities to turn against his pursuers

» Holocube

This essential device is picked up at the beginning of your adventure and explains where you need to go to properly continue your quest.

» Credits

You won't get far on Titan without money. Credits can be earned by getting a job permit or by simply picking them up from the ground.

» Diary

Belonging to Philip Howard Clark, this diary explains how the aliens were planning to take over and what Conrad must do to stop them.

» Force Field

Conrad's friend Ian gives this to him on Level 2. It's a relatively useful device that can shield Conrad for a limited amount of time.

» Gun

Conrad's gun is never far from his side, which is handy, as he has to use it a lot. A dependable weapon that makes short work of anything.

» ID Card

Conrad is given this by the stranger he helps on the first stage. It allows him to get about in the city of New Washington.

» Key

There are lots of blocked-off areas on the world of Titan. These small devices will ensure that Conrad is able to get through all of them.

» Map

New Washington is a massive area with lots of different locations. This handy map highlights key areas, making navigation much easier.

» Shield

There are plenty out to get Conrad, so this shield, which can absorb four hits, is very useful. It can also be recharged at specific waypoints.

» Work Permit

Conrad needs to earn money to get fake papers, so he uses this work permit to get a variety of different jobs and therefore some cash.

» Tele Receiver

An amazingly handy device that Conrad can use for teleportation purposes. Simply select it then throw it to the floor.

» Tele Control

Once you've thrown your Tele Receiver to the floor, you can use this device to instantly transport to it. Very useful for navigating tricky areas.

Memorable Moments

Sit back and enjoy a few of Flashback's many highlights

The chase

Flashback's opening credits sequence where Conrad flees from his antagonists still manages to impress after all these years. It sets up the action beautifully and gives you a clear indication of the cinematic excellence that is to come as the game progresses.

Meeting Conrad

Sure, the techniques used to animate Conrad had been seen before, but watching the amnesiac agent as he leaps, runs and somersaults around the screen is still a joy. He also dresses far cooler than Mechner's Prince.

The pick-up

It sounds a trite thing, but picking up objects in *Flashback* is cool. Admittedly, seeing the same animation continuously used does grate a little, but it's still an impressive way of drawing you in to the on-screen action.

Frantic escape

There's a wonderful moment in one of *Flashback*'s early levels where Conrad has to frantically outrun a detonation – there's actually another in the game's finale, but this one sticks in the memory. Run, Conrad, run.

It's time to start running

Conrad's frantic dash through *Death Tower* is a massive change of pace from the rest of the game, with the player constantly kept on his toes by a seemingly never-ending line of enemies to escape.

Story time

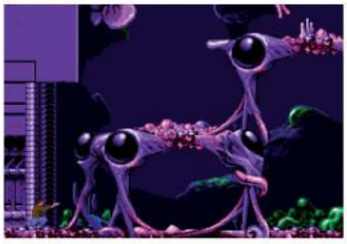
This is clever. Upon reaching Ian, you're given your memories back in a *Total Recall*-style chair. You're then treated to an elaborate sequence that sets up the cinematic chase that you witnessed at *Flashback*'s beginning. Very new wave.

Breaking glass

It seems incredibly minor here, but there was a moment on Level 4 where we just couldn't progress any further. Frustrated, we took out Conrad's gun and shot a wall, only for it to disintegrate in a shattering of glass. Genius.

Job centre

While plenty of early videogames focused on a profession as their gameplay's main focus, not many of them saw you doing jobs within the framework of the actual game. Are there any earlier than *Flashback*? Let us know.

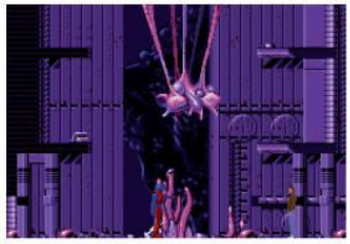


Meet the Morphs

If you thought Conrad's animation was impressive, wait until you see the Morphs. Devoid of their human skins, these rubbery aliens slide around the screen with a sickening realism that still looks absolutely fantastic.

Alien HQ_

After traversing some dour locations, the aliens' home planet is a thing of beauty, capturing the stylish visuals of the opening jungle. It's all rather pink, but the strange plants and creatures that live in it make it feel like a real ecosystem.



Brain freeze

This is an exhilarating battle that has Conrad desperately trying to shut down the evil cerebrum, while fending off an infinite supply of Morphs. It's rather frustrating, but it still lodges itself within your memory.

Due to its massive success, Flashback spawned two sequels, only one of which received a commercial release

Fade To Black

By the time Paul Cuisset released *Flashback*'s sequel, the gaming world had gone 3D crazy. Playing like a cross between *Tomb Raider* and *Metal Gear Solid*, *Fade To Black* was a third-person adventure that utilised the now-popular over-the-shoulder viewpoint.

The tricky control system and slow pace of Conrad make this a world away from the original game and almost kills it in places, but it remains a slick adventure that does capture the essence of *Flashback*.

Flashback Legends

Conrad was also set to appear in an adventure for the GBA, due in 2004. Unlike *Fade To Black*, the action once again reverted to the side-on gameplay of old and shared many elements with the original game. Locations were very similar and included New Delphi City, the Morph planet and a jungle, while familiar enemies were also present.

Sadly, as Delphine Software ran into financial difficulties, the game was eventually cancelled, seemingly doomed to disappear forever... until a leaked beta ROM appeared on the internet in 2008. Despite lots of bugs and technical issues, the ROM gave a good indication of how the final game may have turned out, and it looks truly gorgeous on its later stages. What a shame, then, that Conrad's adventures had to end in such a downbeat way.

Flashback

Conrad couldn't be kept down for long, and a reboot of the original game, called *Flashback*, was released in 2013. Despite being helmed by Paul Cuisset and adding new mechanics like 360º shooting, it wasn't a patch on the original game (which was actually included in an arcade machine of all things).

Flashback – The Movie

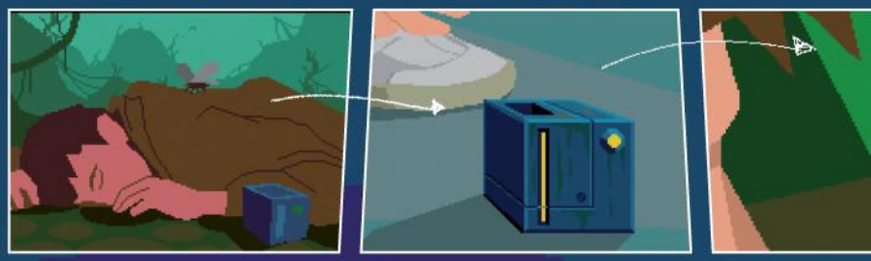
One of the best things about *Flashback* is its gripping and enjoyable storyline. Despite the limitations of the home systems that it appeared on, Paul Cuisset uses a number of clever cinematic techniques – including, appropriately, a flashback scene – in order to immerse the player in Conrad's dangerous world. While it borrows heavily from many classic sci-fi films, *Flashback*'s tale is a surprisingly adult one and is an interesting cautionary tale. Knowing that not everyone is going to have the time to experience its greatness, we've put together these handy little storyboards, so you can review Conrad's story at your own pace. Enjoy!

Part One

Our introduction to Conrad is watching his thudding feet as he desperately tries to escape two trenchcoat-wearing enemies. Despite quickly hopping on a nearby jetbike, his antagonists follow him in a large spacecraft. Several salvos later and Conrad's bike is hit and he crash lands in the jungles of Titan. After several moments of searching, he's eventually left for dead.

Part Two

Upon waking up, Conrad's first task is to retrieve the holocube that holds his memories. The jungle is filled with danger, but he discovers a wounded stranger who begs for help. After Conrad finds the stranger's teleporter, the grateful person teleports away but leaves behind an ID card. Conrad discovers the entrance to New Washington and, after paying for an anti-G belt, reaches his destination.



Part Three

In New Washington, Conrad seeks out his friend Ian, who restores his memory. The player soon discovers that Conrad has created a device that enables him to view the molecular structure of humans. He soon discovers that aliens are among the population and, fearing for his life, transfers his thoughts to the holocube before his memory is wiped.

Part Four

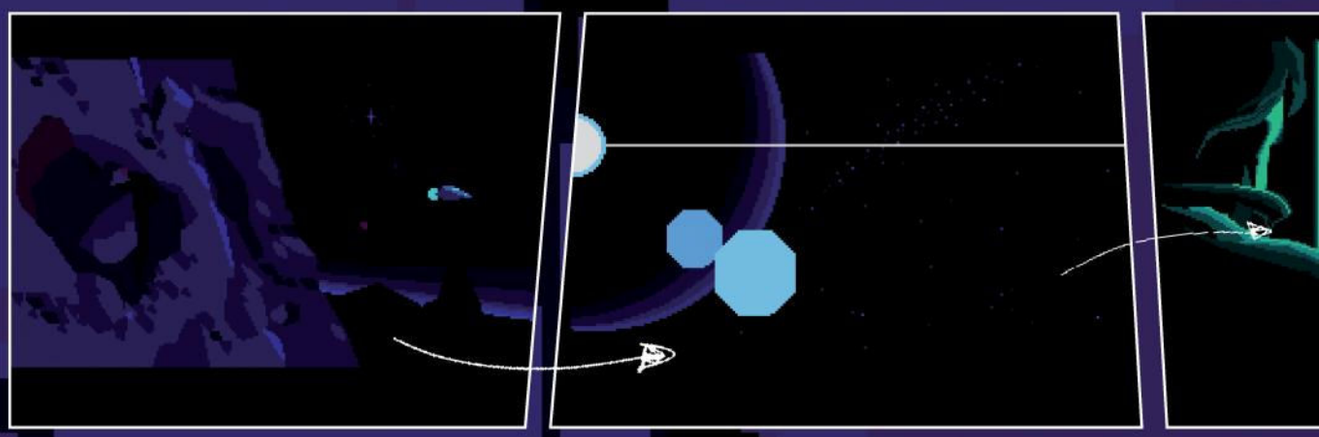
Conrad quickly learns that he'll never earn the money to buy a ticket to Earth, so his best bet is taking part in the popular game show, *Death Tower*. After doing some jobs, Conrad earns enough money to pay a forger for papers so that he can enter *Death Tower*. He eventually wins the contest and immediately heads to Earth and seeks out the aliens' hideout.

Part Five

When he reaches the hideout, he finds three aliens deep in discussion. Plans to take over the planet are moving faster than Conrad had anticipated, and he discovers that they are planning on assaulting Earth in their millions. Before he can do anything, the grate he was hiding behind gives way, revealing his location. Conrad is taken for interrogation. Things don't look good...

Part Six

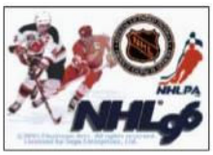
Conrad escapes from prison and finds a teleporter that takes him to the aliens' planet. Once there, he discovers a human prisoner but is unable to help before aliens murder him. Conrad is given an atomic charger and picks up the prisoner's diary, which tells him how to blow up the planet. After placing the charge, Conrad flees into space but soon discovers that he's not in any known galaxy. He is last seen entering suspended animation after putting a message on his screen that implies that it may be some time before he is rescued.



REPLAY
ANTI G SYSTEM
OK
STANDARD
Then I save the contents of my memory and send it to Ian
"I HAVE ERASED HIS MEMORY."
Thanks to our knowledge, the humans are now capable
A SPY... Throw the wretch
It's impossible for me to calculate my return trajectory.
The galaxy I am in today doesn't appear on any of our navigation charts.
I'll probably drift in space for a very long time...

NHL 96

EA'S ICEY ALTERNATIVE TO FIFA REMAINS A BELTER



- **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
- **RELEASED:** 1995
- **GENRE:** SPORTS
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** MEGA DRIVE

HISTORY

I've always enjoyed ice hockey. It's such a faster, more brutal alternative to football and there are always goals being scored, and I do like it when goals are constantly getting scored.

Although there would be two more *NHL* games released for the Mega Drive by Electronic Arts after *NHL 96*, this was the last that I played on the console at the time, as I was already in the process of upgrading and moving over to Sega's superior Saturn. It was a great way to finish off my relationship with the sport on Sega's 16-bit console, however, and it remains cracking fun to play today.

Everything about ice hockey is perfectly captured in EA's fantastic game. The pace throughout is brilliant; it captures the sheer thrill of being knocked around the ice, while the fights are always convincing and satisfying to take part in. It didn't really bring many new gameplay mechanics to the series, but purists would argue it didn't need to. It also continued the tradition of EA games being suitably better on the Mega Drive than they were on the SNES (which is a particularly salient point for Mega Drive owners).

It's the gameplay that makes *NHL 96* so much fun to play, though. After EA managed to mess up the passing in *NHL 95*, it re-tweaked its template and created a game that flowed far better than before. There's a lovely back and forth to *NHL 96* that was missing from its predecessor and it is helped by the game's more realistic visuals, too. In short, it's one of the best sports games I ever played on Sega's 16-bit console and returning to it today doesn't tarnish its impact one little bit.

TOP 25 MEGA DRIVE GAMES

Sega's Mega Drive has some of the greatest games around, covering a wide range of different genres. Here is the cream of that crop. How many did you get to play?

Disney's Aladdin

DEVELOPER: VIRGIN INTERACTIVE
YEAR RELEASED: 1993 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

25 **Of all of** the versions, the Mega Drive's *Aladdin* was best. Surprisingly put together by legendary developer David Perry in just 99 days, it may have been a platform game – the staple genre of the majority of film tie-ins from the Eighties and early Nineties – but the cartoon graphics, silky smooth animation and diverse nature of the 11 levels was inspired by *Sonic*. It therefore had a frenetic pace and numerous collectables with flowing action that remains great fun.

Jungle Strike

DEVELOPER: ELECTRONIC ARTS
YEAR RELEASED: 1993 **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

24 **A chopper title** that was so good it kept a popular series going for three more games, *Jungle Strike*'s strategical elements and full-on airborne blasting ensures its worthy place in our readers' top 25. The wealth of missions meant that gamers played for lengthy periods of time and, while let down by the sound every now and then, there remained a feeling of being immersed in a strong battle against an intelligent enemy. Well-ported, its natural home was within this original Mega Drive version where, aggressive war-mongering aside, design and control reigned supreme.

Rocket Knight Adventures

DEVELOPER: KONAMI
YEAR RELEASED: 1993 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

23 **Seamless blending of** levels and the feeling that this first Konami game for the Mega Drive threw every graphical trick it could into a big pot, *Rocket Knight Adventures* was impressive. This was a game that oozed innovation (save for the boss battles) and higher difficulty levels lent it a challenge no gamer would want to live without experiencing.

Shining Force

DEVELOPER: CLIMAX ENTERTAINMENT
YEAR RELEASED: 1992 **GENRE:** RPG

22 **A shining example** of a fine fantasy RPG, this turn-based tactical exploration of the Kingdom of Guardiana had the ability to see enemies in advance, giving players ample time to work out the correct and most intriguing strategy to employ in order to bloodthirstily slay them in combat. With elements of steampunk and a well-devised plot that employed humour and involved a great range of characters, *Shining Force*'s grid-based action and slick presentation made it an instant classic and it was recognised as such by many who played it back in 1992. Sure, there are some bizarre moments in the English translation – Lug, Luke, gah, it's so confusing – but that didn't stop it from getting into *Mega*'s Top 33 of all time and neither, it seems, did it bar it from entering our Top 25. Play it again today on iOS (like many other Sega classics) for pure retro gaming on the go.

ToeJam & Earl

DEVELOPER: JOHNSON VOORSANGER PRODUCTIONS
YEAR: 1991 **GENRE:** ACTION/ADVENTURE

21 **The cover screamed** 'jammin' and it seems this totally cool and chilled-out game struck a chord. Everyone likes a laugh, and ToeJam & Earl were a comedy duo to rival some of the greatest. The slow build-up at the start of this top-down action game soon gave way to plentiful giggles, and the developers no doubt had a ball when packing in their belly dancers, nerds and bogeymen among other assorted weird happenings, most of which parodied urban culture in the Eighties. *ToeJam & Earl* came into its own, in particular, when the two-player mode kicked in to allow gamers to share the experience with a buddy. While it wasn't a hard game to beat, the tone of the game drove players forward (albeit sometimes at a sedentary pace) and there was a sense of never quite knowing what was to come.

QuackShot Starring Donald Duck

DEVELOPER: SEGA AM7
YEAR: 1991 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

19 **Perhaps you were** dewy-eyed over Dewey (and Huey and Louie). *QuackShot* proved that older gamers could enjoy some Disney action, but the beautiful graphics were marred by slow gameplay. This was perhaps better for newbies.

John Madden Football '92

DEVELOPER: ELECTRONIC ARTS
YEAR: 1991 **GENRE:** SPORTS

18 **The game may** have lacked NFL and NFLPA licences, but EA's second title to feature the legendary American football commentator started the annual tweak-the-gameplay trend that kicked off a long-running franchise. And boy, it was a joy to watch that crowd celebrate.

Thunder Force III

DEVELOPER: TECHNOSOFT
YEAR: 1990 **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

17 **Like *R-Type*, this** horizontally scrolling shoot-'em-up excelled throughout, searing eyeballs with sharp sprites, polished parallax scrolling and bad-ass backgrounds that made the rat-a-tat waves of battling baddies and their barrage of bullets a pleasure. Great bosses too.

Golden Axe

DEVELOPER: SEGA AM7
YEAR: 1989 **GENRE:** SCROLLING FIGHTER

16 **One of the most** well known Mega Drive games in existence, even for those that didn't play it. *Golden Axe*'s fun two-player mode made this scrolling fighter shine, as players head butted, kicked and sliced their way to victory with more than a nod or two to the *Conan* films.

Ghouls 'n Ghosts

DEVELOPER: CAPCOM/SEGA
YEAR: 1989 **GENRE:** RUN-AND-GUN

15 **Straight from the** arcades to home machines, this run-and-gun classic (converted by Sega) is just as frustrating as the arcade original. It remains a fantastic port however and had owners grinning at their SNES-owning friends. Until *Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts* came along…

Desert Strike

DEVELOPER: ELECTRONIC ARTS
YEAR RELEASED: 1992 GENRE: SHOOT-'EM-UP

20 **The subject matter** of *Desert Strike* is as relevant today as it was back then, with the affairs of the Middle East still firmly on the agenda. As befitting such a scenario, it was rather political, referencing the inability of the UN to take direct action against a war-mongering dictator and his army. However, it was also a sophisticated shoot-'em-up that was a world away from the more conventional examples of the genre, proving so popular, it was made for a host of other machines. Gulf War inspiration aside, *Desert Strike* had a rather fresh approach to war, although lead designer Mike Posehn had never made a game before he tackled this project. He ensured the game had everything you needed for a rich experience, be it maps, cut-scenes to explain the action or mission details to work out what to do next. The five main missions were supplemented with ten sub-assignments, lending depth and variety, as well as ensuring that gamers would be able to feast their eyes on the wonderful graphics and let their ears take in the Ron Hubbard sounds of war for a number of hours.

Dynamite Headdy

DEVELOPER: TREASURE

YEAR RELEASED: 1994 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

14 **Developed by Treasure,** the bright, colourful visuals of *Dynamite Headdy* will have stuck in the heads of all the gamers who tried this genre-busting platformer back in 1994. An all-so-knowing and relevant tale of a puppet called Headdy in pursuit of a girl's attention, it could easily have gone down the path of *Mario* (which, admittedly is a great route for games to take). After all, Headdy discovers that his girl and his friends have been kidnapped. What to do? Go and rescue them.

But where *Dynamite Headdy* succeeded was in turning perception upside down, literally at times. It also relied on getting the right head on, whether it be a strength-increasing offensive noggin or one that would let him snooze. It meant that, even for platform fans, it was a new experience, helped along by lots of useful characters.

Flashback

DEVELOPER: DELPHINE SOFTWARE INTERNATIONAL

YEAR RELEASED: 1992 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

13 **It is the** best selling French game of all time, according to Guinness World Records, and US Gold brought it to the wider masses. The way the screens slid in rather than scrolled when the player neared the edge, gave it an old-school feel even when it was released in 1992, but the rotoscoping and use of FMV made it feel part of the future. *Flashback* became a massive hit and was marketed as being a CD-ROM game on a cartridge due to its huge scope and size. All of the backdrops were hand drawn, and so the style was very much unlike anything that came before it. This lent it an ambitious edge which could be seen in the manner of play, the realms of role-play coming to the fore in level two and enemies suddenly feeling sharper and more intelligent the deeper you go.

Streets Of Rage

DEVELOPER: SEGA AM7

YEAR RELEASED: 1991 **GENRE:** SCROLLING FIGHTER

12 **At the time** of release, many regarded *Streets Of Rage* to be the Mega Drive's best fighter. We won't say it was the best ever, for reasons that will undoubtedly become clear later, but it was a two-player combat game of excellence that had scores of enemies battling against you over eight levels. A worthy alternative to Capcom's *Final Fight*, which was exceedingly popular on Nintendo's SNES, it may have been a little slow (particularly if you played as Adam) but there was no denying that the game's combat made it highly satisfying to play. It had a great multiplayer mode as well, giving it the edge over the SNES ports of Capcom's popular fighter. Add in some truly astonishing trance-style music, courtesy of Yuzo Koshiro and Motohiro Kawashima, and it becomes easy to see why Sega's scrolling fighter remains so popular.

Strider

DEVELOPER: CAPCOM/SEGA

YEAR RELEASED: 1990 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

11 **This is quite** simply one of the finest arcade ports of its time on Sega's machine and it still manages to impress today. Sega handled the ambitious port itself, and the end result is a magnificent early release for the Mega Drive that proved just how powerful the 16-bit console was. *Strider* remains beautifully animated as he fights his way through the game's huge levels and, while certain sections are prone to some rather irritating sprite flicker, it's still amazing to see just how polished Sega's port actually is. Full of inventive level design - including the best second level ever - and featuring a bewildering array of crazy bosses to battle through, *Strider* is Capcom at its most inventive and creative and it remains a sensational platformer. Filled with dazzling set pieces and excellent tunes, *Strider* on the Mega Drive was arguably one of the best ports of the game, with only the Sharp X68000, PC Engine and PlayStation versions bettering it. Darran is still in shock that it didn't make your top ten.

Thunder Force IV

DEVELOPER: TECHNOSOFT
YEAR: 1992 **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

10 **Okay, so we** kind of glossed over *Thunder Force III* and that is because, as great as it was, many readers feel this is better. For those reading in America, you may know this as *Lightening Force: Quest For The Darkstar*, a game that rocked to a synth beat and locked to a hair-pulling regional program that meant European Mega Drive and Genesis owners couldn't play the Japanese version.

Thunder Force IV wasn't a gigantic leap from *Thunder Force III*. It was a bit of gameplay tinkering here, a little polish of the graphics there, and yet the result is considered by many to be the best of the series. It may still be a shoot-'em-up that scrolls to the side, but you could go up further than the boundaries of the 14-inch telly that you had in your bedroom and it felt as if you had loads more freedom.

Looking as if the graphic artists had stayed up day and night for months on end due to the incredible detail of the backdrops and sprites, it is fair to say that the programmers, on the other hand, may have had some sleep. There wasn't so much innovative thinking going on, especially in terms of speed where slow-down was an issue at times but not enough to make you wince.

However, if something was achieved, then it was a sheer show of power. If nothing else, the game, while starting to feel as if it was just offering standard shoot-'em-up fare, showed the true power of the Mega Drive and you sensed that the achievement could not have been possible on other consoles. With the history of the series behind it, *Thunder Force IV* could afford to push on incrementally rather than make a wholesale change and, today, if you were going to go back and play one of the series' games, you should certainly make a bee-line for this.

Castle Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse

DEVELOPER: SEGA AM7
YEAR RELEASED: 1990 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

9 **Although you may** think home consoles were awash with *Mickey Mouse* games, this was actually only the second outing for Disney's anthropomorphic rodent. It helped to cement the Mega Drive's reputation as a must-have machine, such was the addictive nature and jaw-dropping graphics that combined to make the game so loved. Beautiful parallax scrolling and a range of animated faces brought the world and Mickey to life. It wasn't an incredibly hard game and the obstacles and traps that lay before Mickey were by no means insurmountable. But who could fail to fall for a charming butt-stomp that dispatches Mickey's enemies? Not us.

The Revenge Of Shinobi

DEVELOPER: SEGA AM7
YEAR RELEASED: 1989 **GENRE:** RUN-AND-GUN

8 **Revenge is such** an ugly word, isn't it? But, without wishing to sound corny, it made for a very sweet game. The sequel to *Shinobi*'s 1987 debut turned Joe Musashi into a household name and, while he pounded the streets of his eight districts in a bid to confront Neo Zeed, he got to biff Batman and spring a surprise on Spider-Man among an assortment of other well-known hero-baddies. Such blasé use of said icons (explained away by the doings of a shape shifter) got Sega into some bother and it had to make some later revisions. But that only provides for what is a good yarn – not that a well-animated, sonically beautiful and addictive game would need such assistance.

Road Rash II

DEVELOPER: ELECTRONIC ARTS
YEAR RELEASED: 1993 **GENRE:** RACING

7 ***Road Rash II*** is one of only two racing games in the top 25, showing that either the Mega Drive wasn't really blessed with a vast selection of such titles, or that our readers couldn't give two hoots about many of them. Great for one or two players, and having three bike classes in Ultra Light, Nitro Class and Super Bike, *Road Rash II* had a number of options that included a split-screen game, pure head-to-head and some smacks to opposing riders' faces. The learning curve was spot on too, with the difficulty increased after each section. The good news was that you could just keep going until you fell asleep (not while racing, we hope) and, once you had secured your racing passwords, you could start from where you finished off.

Micro Machines Turbo Tournament '96

DEVELOPER: SUPERSONIC SOFTWARE
YEAR RELEASED: 1995 **GENRE:** RACING

6 **While basically *Micro Machines 2,*** this version of the top-down tiny racing game was exclusive to the Sega Mega Drive. The game itself was already an enhancement of its predecessor, with different handling techniques that depended on the vehicles and new cars. *Turbo Tournament '96* added the track construction kit from the PC version of *MM2*, as well as updated tracks, meaning that Mega Drive owners could feel special and play the best version of the sequel too. This game wasn't produced by Codemasters but instead was contracted out to Supersonic, a company that was able to play to its strengths and produce a truly fantastic party game.

Sonic The Hedgehog 3

DEVELOPER: SONIC TEAM
YEAR RELEASED: 1994 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

5 **Sonic's first entry** in our list and it's predictably high. Sonic's last main Mega Drive game was an impressive refinement of the series, featuring everything that had made the hedgehog so popular but on a far larger scale. Notable for introducing Knuckles to the series, *Sonic 3* also used the lock-in technology that had been created by Sonic Team and Sega Technical Institute for *Sonic & Knuckles*. It's a fantastic platformer with excellent visuals, super slick animation and a superb soundtrack – but according to you, it's not Sonic's best Mega Drive outing.

Sonic The Hedgehog

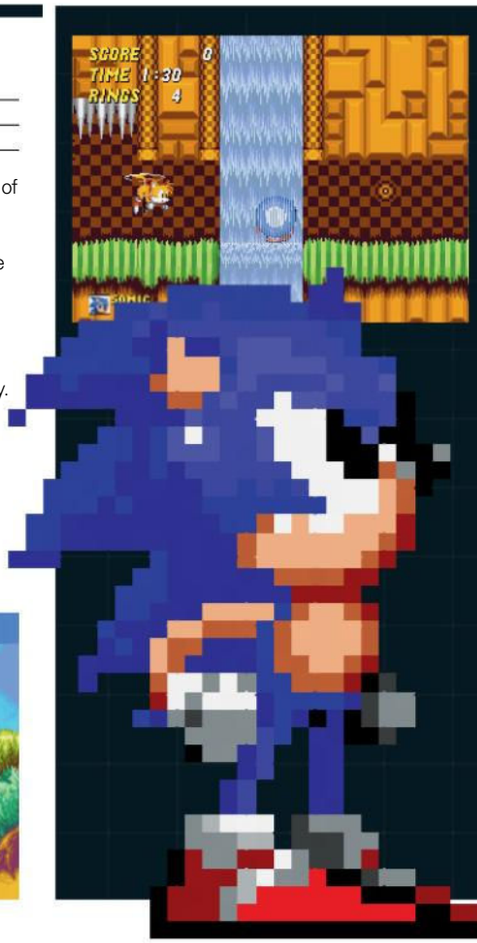
DEVELOPER: SONIC TEAM
YEAR RELEASED: 1991 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

4 **A true blue** classic. *Sonic The Hedgehog* was eventually bundled with the Mega Drive in a move by Sega's Tom Kalinske to draw interest away from the evil-sounding *Altered Beast* that was currently packaged with the console. This shrewd move allowed Sega's new mascot to go toe-to-toe with Mario – not that the fat plumber would ever manage to keep up with Sonic's blistering speed. Bold, sleek and cool, *Sonic The Hedgehog* was as much a statement about Sega's attitude as it was a superb platformer, and it's little wonder that it went on to become one of the system's best games.

Gunstar Heroes

DEVELOPER: TREASURE
YEAR RELEASED: 1993 **GENRE:** RUN-AND-GUN

3 **Treasure's Mega Drive** debut is one of the greatest calling cards of the 16-bit generation. Packed with imagination, and pulling off graphical tricks that the machine was supposedly incapable of, *Gunstar Heroes* was a revelation upon release and remains a stunning achievement. Like many Treasure games it has superlative visuals, but also understands the importance of great gameplay. *Gunstar Heroes* has tight controls, a clever weapon system (you can combine weapons) and well-structured levels that culminate in fantastic, imaginative boss fights. Treasure would go on to release five more games for Sega's console, but its astounding debut is clearly your favourite.



Sonic The Hedgehog 2

DEVELOPER: SONIC TEAM
YEAR RELEASED: 1992 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

2 **What? More Sonic?** Oh yes – but then Sega's blue mascot was a major icon, and never more so than on the Mega Drive. *Sonic 2* was able to pick up on the momentum of the first game that pretty much every Mega Drive owner would have played to death, but Sega knew it had to be special. It was released on 24 November 1992 on an occasion that was dubbed 'Sonic 2uesday'. It became the Mega Drive's best-selling title and players once again collected rings and got Sonic to run as fast as they could, but in came spin dashing and Sonic's partner Tails, whom a second player could control. A genius solution to Sonic potentially dashing away was to have Tails make his way back to him automatically. *Sonic 2* is, and there is no doubt here, the hedgehog's finest gaming moment.

Streets Of Rage 2

■ **DEVELOPER:** SEGA AM7 ■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1992 ■ **GENRE:** SCROLLING FIGHTER

We were surprised that *Streets Of Rage 2* took the top spot as we genuinely thought that it would be a *Sonic* game sitting at the top of your list. Sega's superb sequel strode into the lead very quickly though, and soon began to amass huge support making it undoubtedly your number one Mega Drive game of all time.

Everything about Sega's sequel was bigger, bolder, and well… better. The most noticeable difference was the truly spectacular looking sprites that looked far beefier than the weedy looking efforts shown in the original game. The gameplay had also been greatly refined, with special moves being granted to each character, including an attack from Axel Stone that looked a lot like Ryu's Dragon Punch. As with Capcom's *Final Fight*, pulling off a special move was a great way of defeating multiple enemies at once and also granted you a small amount of invulnerability (at the expense of some of your precious health).

Such strategic use of these moves was vital in order to achieve victory in a game that was hard going no matter how good you became or what difficulty level you decided to play on. However, it was clear that Sega didn't go down the path of merely bolting on a few extras. It re-jigged the entire game and was bigger and better in so many respects, not least in the aforementioned chunkier characters that moved with far greater animation than before.

New characters were also introduced, namely Max Thunder, a huge lumbering tank, and Eddie 'Skate' Hunter, a fast-paced skater who, despite his young age, had no problem leaping onto the backs of strangers and punching their faces in. Blaze Fielding and Axel Stone also returned, ensuring that players would have no problem finding a fighter that would suit their playing style.

The co-operative fighting of the original once again came to the fore, allowing players to team up to pull off silly, showy moves that would decimate enemies and allow you to combat *Streets Of Rage 2*'s occasionally tough difficulty spikes. Bosses were tougher as well, and a lot more inventive, ensuring that you'd keep plugging away until you had scrapped your way through all eight stages.

Sega had even improved the excellent soundtrack, once again securing Yuzo Koshiro and Motohiro Kawashima to create some stirring tunes to accompany all the on-screen fisticuffs. It remains one of the best Mega Drive soundtracks of all time, with the musicians putting in just as much effort as the programmers to ensure that Sega's sequel was better in every possible way. Everything about Sega's ambitious sequel was massively enhanced, culminating in the best scrolling fighter for any 16-bit system. Hell, for many it remains the best scrolling fighter of all time.

Five reasons why it's great

- Each character has their own unique moves and abilities
- There are loads of weapons to pick up and use, from knives to metal bars
- It has one of the best techno soundtracks heard in any videogame we've played
- Graphically superb, the characters are arcade-chunky and the backdrops ooze quality
- Action moves left to right and up and down giving a feeling of exploration as you biff opponents

The Mega Drive – or Genesis as it's also known – remains Sega's greatest selling console, selling over 40 million units since its release. Here we explain why you should be building the ultimate collection for Sega's ambitious 16-bit console and highlight its best games and peripherals

SEGA ME

» **Manufacturer:** Sega » **Models:** Mega Drive, Mega Drive 2, Mega Drive 3 » **Launched:** 1988 (Japan), 1989 (US), 1990 (Europe) » **Country of origin:** Japan

GA DRIVE

The Collector's Guide

» The Super Magic Drive was a copying device, allowing gamers to transfer ROM data to floppy disks or PCs.

» The Sega Mega Drive had numerous updates over the years. The Mega Drive II shown here was first released in 1993.

Why it's collectable

While Sega is no longer a major player in the videogame hardware world today, the legacy of its 1988 release – the Sega Mega Drive – still lives on. Despite being discontinued in the late Nineties and moved aside to make way for its younger 32-bit sibling, countless gamers are still lining up today to secure a library of Mega Drive classics.

The Mega Drive was not only set to be the successor to the Master System, but it was also a direct result of Hayao Nakayama's desire to bring the coin-op experience home. By modifying its System-16 arcade hardware, Sega intended to create a console every bit as powerful, and one that made it easy to port arcade releases to. While this creation held a lot of promise and potential, its eventual October release in Japan was overshadowed by *Super Mario Bros 3* on the Nintendo Famicom, released a week earlier.

However, its importance was soon recognised once it arrived in the West. On 30 November, 1990, Sega brought its console over to European shores to build upon the strong foundations that the Master System had already cemented. With arcade ports of *Altered Beast*, *Golden Axe* and *Ghouls 'n Ghosts* available from day one, the Mega Drive had finally found success – or at least the start of it.

Aggressive advertising campaigns, Electronic Art's unauthorised reverse engineering of the hardware, and a thriving import market would begin to push Sega closer to success, but this didn't truly begin to accelerate until 23 June, 1990. On this day an instant hit was born – bearing stunning visuals, fast gameplay and an iconic soundtrack, all of which were accompanied by an attitude-filled mascot – Sonic The Hedgehog. The speedy blue mammal's emergence marked what may be the most important event in Sega's history, and the Mega Drive's lifetime. The UK based publication *Mean Machines Magazine* singled it out as 'the best platform game on the Mega Drive' to date and their assessment was spot on – not only did the title go on to sell 15 million copies worldwide and become the start of a long series, Sonic also became an internationally recognisable character. The shelves of Woolworths and the back pages of the Argos catalogue were flooded with *Sonic The Hedgehog* pencil cases, jigsaws, comics, clothing and sweets.

Whilst this is only a snippet of the 16-bit system's story, retro gamers often find themselves returning to the Mega Drive to indulge in its plethora of software that's stood the test of time. *Sonic 2*, *Streets Of Rage II* and *Gunstar Heroes* are just a small selection from the colossal count of 531 known unique European releases. While the number of available titles towered over the Japanese catalogue of just over 400 releases, it was dwarfed by the run in North America, where the platform welcomed over 700 titles. This difference produced a selection of region exclusive releases that failed to make the cut worldwide. Europe in particular missed out on ground-breaking titles such as *Pulseman*, *Twinkle Tale*, *Musha Aleste* and *Golden Axe III*, leaving fans wondering why, as they headed down to the local import shop prepared to pay double.

» Due to the popularity of Sega's console there were plenty of great magazines available for it.

» The Multi-Mega was an interesting combination of the Mega Drive and its Mega-CD add-on. It's now quite rare.

Did you know?

■ In December 1994, the hit TV show *Bad Influence* gave two minutes of prime time to something that could have knocked the stuffing out of Sega's Christmas plans. An all new and unauthorised Mega Drive hardware clone, the Scorpion 16, was demonstrated on air. For just £70, this bootleg device offered compatibility with the existing library of 16-bit titles along with built in functionality to play region locked imports. Somehow, this unofficial kit managed to make its way into a few select high street chains, but not for long. The Scorpion 16 was soon nowhere to be seen and has since become an incredible rarity.

» *Mean Machines* was an awesome magazine, covering plenty of essential Mega Drive releases like *Probotector*.

This broad selection, however, did suffer from a highly contagious infection of sports software – with nearly one quarter of the PAL selection on offer being digital renditions of the playing field, something which could be attributed to Electronic Arts' influence on the 16-bit era. Initially, Mediagenic took control of Sega's request to develop a licenced Joe Montana Football game – however, the team was soon behind schedule. With Sega of America panicking, EA was soon called upon during extra time to pass them a lifeline. Once EA's last minute replacement game touched down, it was an instant hit. Sega of Japan's previous concerns regarding sports games being a poor investment was soon slam dunked. Countless developers caught on to this growing trend, and alongside EA, just about every sport under its glowing stadium lights had its own Mega Drive triumph. The technically impressive *FIFA International Soccer* was undoubtedly the most popular digital football offering; however, these days it has quickly become the least favourite. Its never ending unwanted presence at car boot sales and secondhand shops usually signals that you were just pipped to the post of a more appealing selection.

Although the Mega Drive was officially laid to rest in the late Nineties, the last two decades have seen the system still populate the production line. South America has continued to sell the 16-bit hardware, with distributor Tec Toy targeting those unable to afford modern consoles. During an observant stroll through a South American high street, it's no surprise to see Mega Drive compatible *Guitar Hero* controllers, exclusive ports of more recent games such as *Duke Nukem 3D*, and even brand new releases such as *Férias Frustradas Do Pica-Pau*.

Elsewhere around the world, a handful of developers still consider the Mega Drive a viable platform for new releases. Super Fighter Team, to name just one, recently acquired the rights to translate and re-release a selection of obscure foreign releases. The first of these was a 1996 Chinese exclusive RPG known as *Beggar Prince*, which saw a physical cartridge release in 2006, and further proved that there was still a market for new software on the Mega Drive. Super Fighter Team released a couple more titles after that, but the playing field was then forever changed upon WaterMelon's late arrival. Their heavily delayed atmospheric RPG, *Pier Solar*, took six years to develop and became the largest title in Mega Drive history at 64Mbit. The limited 2010 print run was met with much controversy over a delayed pre-ordering process, leaving many to demand a refund. As the homemade hit now fetches nearly ten times its original cost when placed up for auction, those who abandoned ship early had to hold out for the (also limited) reprint edition.

The Mega Drive has become a popular starting ground for nostalgic gamers, while bringing more than enough challenge to the hardcore collectors. The array of reasonably priced definitive titles and several rarities bordering on the quadruple figure mark at auction, further prove that there's something for everyone with Sega's 16-bit system – as long as you can withstand all the American footballers and soccer superstars.

THE PERIPHERALS

» There was a large number of excellent games available for the Master System, making this device essential if you owned the console.

» There are two versions of the Master System Converter available. This model was designed to work with the Mega Drive II.

Master System Converter

While Hayao Nakayama and Hideki Sato were collaborating to create the Sega Mega Drive, the latter of these two masterminds decided to add a little more sparkle. Sato's forward thinking introduced built-in compatibility for keyboards, mice, floppy disk drives, modems, graphics tablets and even a printer, regardless of whether this additional functionality would ever be used by consumers. But this was just the start of a console desperate to be something more.

Not only did this pre-emptive planning pave the way for the future release of the Sega Mega CD add-on, but it also offered Sega's back catalogue a lifeline. Backwards compatibility with the Sega Master System (or Sega Mark III in Japan) was one of Sato's final additions. However, like the others, it would require additional hardware to work.

Three months after the initial launch of the Sega Mega Drive in Japan, the Power Base Converter (or Mega Adapter as it was known in Japan) was released. This unusually shaped device sat snugly on the top of an original Mega Drive console, covering a good portion of its exterior. At the top of the Power Base Convertor was a small flap that, when exposed, provided access to a Master System cartridge connector, ready for the game of your choice. Below this connector was a small credit card sized slot. While Sega did release their own 16-bit banking software, this card slot wasn't for your life's savings – instead, you could insert Sega's tried and tested media format containing games and software on a flat piece of plastic, the Sega Card (or My Card in Japan). The only other area of interest on the Power Base Converter was the Pause button, a duplicate of the same button found on the 8-bit hardware, and one Sega foolishly didn't wire up to the more accessible start button on the Mega Drive control pad.

How this adapter actually worked, though, is rather interesting. As Sato had already embedded the Master System's central processor (the z80) and sound chip (the SN76489) on the Mega Drive's motherboard, there was little for the Power Base Converter to actually do. Without a single component from the original 8-bit hardware present in the adapter, the Power Base Converter was nothing more than a glorified pass-through-port for Master System games. At ¥4,500 (or £39.95 on its UK release), you might be wondering why such an adapter was necessary. Unfortunately for gamers worldwide, no matter how hard you pushed, the Master System's cartridge pin arrangement was just too dissimilar to that of the Mega Drive's, making the Power Base Converter a mandatory purchase for nostalgic gamers.

When Sega redesigned the Mega Drive in 1993, the perfectly formed Power Base Converter was due a makeover, having become incompatible with the revised hardware. Thus, the Master System Converter II was born. This all new European exclusive adapter – formed for both the Mega Drive I and II – removed the Sega Card slot found on the original device and was more in keeping with the new look.

...AND THE REST

01. Pro Action Replay & Game Genie

■ Born into a culture fuelled by cheat codes and magazine pull-out tips, the Pro Action Replay & Game Genie offered an all new gateway into the world of game hacking. The cartridges, which slotted in-between the console and your game of choice, brought about infinite lives, level skips, one-hit kills and just about anything you could wish for.

02. Arcade Power Stick

■ Further driving home the message that the Sega Mega Drive was well equipped to serve as a coin-op equivalent, a control pad alternative known as the Arcade Power Stick arrived to give you a more authentic grip on the action. The most unusual addition to this peripheral, however, was the inclusion of auto-fire buttons – something arcade purists would likely frown upon.

03. Menacer Light Gun

■ Clearly inspired by Nintendo's release of the Super Scope bazooka, Sega's Menacer light-gun decided to take design one step further than its rival. When fully assembled with its detachable double barrelled scope and shoulder rest, the 16-bit light-gun was far from a worthy investment for reasons other than its sheer ridiculousness.

04. Magic Drive Plus

■ Hailing from the black market, the Magic Drive Plus was the Sega Mega Drive equivalent of the Super Nintendo's Super Wild Card – an unofficial device that could read and write game cartridges onto or from floppy disks. This pirate hardware was much harder to locate than its Super Nintendo counterpart, though it offered just as much functionality – albeit illegally.

05. Magic Key III

■ Throughout the Mega Drive's lifespan developers began devising various methods to prevent games from being imported before their local release date. The Magic Key III, however, rendered all attempts to hold back importers useless, due to its switchable region masking. Games from all over the world could now be played on the console with ease.

06. 4 Way Play

■ Knowing the limitations of the Sega Mega Drive's multiplayer functionality, Electronic Arts created an adapter to bring the party back home. Their 4 Way Play adapter slotted into the two controller ports on the front of the console, expanding the available player slots to four.

07. Justifier

■ While there was already a light-gun available for the Sega Mega Drive, Konami released its own bright digital weapon to accompany their 1993 port of the arcade shooter, *Lethal Enforcers*.

TOP GAMES TO PLAY

Sonic The Hedgehog 2

■ Despite having an incredible prequel to live up to, *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* smashed all expectations and gave Mario twice as much to worry about.

Streets Of Rage II

■ With all new moves and comrades, the bare knuckle brawlers returned in 1992 to take on the mysterious Mr X – powering themselves up with any discarded meat they might find.

Gunstar Heroes

■ Treasure was clearly a developer capable of getting the most out the Mega Drive. The multiplayer mayhem up for grabs in *Gunstar Heroes* is captivating carnage at its best.

The Revenge Of Shinobi

■ Becoming a ninja-master is no easy feat, something Sega's incredibly hard action platformer *The Revenge Of Shinobi* taught gamers the hard way.

Disney Collection: Castle Of Illusion & Quackshot

■ While it might be cheating to include a compilation here, excluding either of Disney's cartoon capers from a top list would be criminal.

PLAY THESE NEXT

Comix Zone

■ *Comix Zone* is a direct result of Sega's boundary-pushing experimentation – a platformer that dared to think outside the box. Jumping from panel to panel of a once static comic book, Sketch Turner must take on one of the biggest Mega Drive challenges around to the sound of Howard Drossin's timeless soundtrack.

Dynamite Headdy

■ Our protagonist Headdy arrives in North Town amidst the evil puppet King Dark Demon's plans to convert the peaceful town's residents into devilish minions. *Dynamite Headdy*'s adventure isn't easy, but it is laced with cute visuals, a catchy musical background and gameplay to marvel at – something developer Treasure is known for.

Dragon's Fury (aka Devil Crash)

■ *Dragon's Fury* was an incredible interpretation of pinball, offering gamers something physical tables could not. The gothic multi-table affair featured demonic armies of skeletons to target whilst being led through winding passages and warp portals. Real tables were given a run for their money.

ToeJam & Earl

■ Any attempt to summarise the funkatron duo's attempt to escape Earth is destined to crash land. This insane multiplayer funk-'em-up, spanning multiple floors connected by disco lifts, is one of those games you need to experience at least once. You'll either love *ToeJam & Earl* or despise their many attempts to make you laugh.

Road Rash II

■ Not only did the sequel race in with more violence, more crashes and more frustration, but it also introduced nitrous oxide boosts and new weaponry. Whether you preferred to cleanly make your way to the finish line or instead, take out every rival with a chain to the face, *Road Rash II* is one of the finest Mega Drive titles ever released.

TOP IMPORT GAMES

Rainbow Islands Extra

■ Despite being a coin-op classic, few decent ports of Taito's 1987 credit gobbler were released. The Mega Drive port, however, lives up to the name despite its default mode introducing questionable robotic enemies.

Golden Axe III

■ Why Sega felt their highly refined finale to the fantasy world hack-and-slash series should never leave Japan is anyone's guess. *Golden Axe III* has since become a rather desirable import.

Monster World IV

■ Stepping aside from its roots, the sixth and final game in the *Wonder Boy/Monster World* series is the incredible story of Asha and her adopted pet Pepe – a 16-bit title not to be missed.

Magical Turbo Hat Flying Adventure

■ Based upon the *Magical Hat* anime series, this bonkers platformer did in fact see a European rehash titled *De-Cap Attack*. The import's untouched charm remains more desirable.

Granada

■ Although many will turn to *Gleylancer* and *Musha Aleste* for their shoot-'em-up fix, *Granada* is quite the hidden gem. WolfTeam's on-land tank freeroamer is often, and unfairly, overlooked.

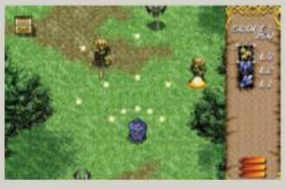
IMPORT THESE NEXT

Pulseman

■ Although most will remember Game Freak for its work on *Pokémon*, its 1994 Mega Drive offering *Pulseman* is not one you should dismiss too quickly. The energetic platformer centred around a cyber-terrorism battle brings a new dimension to this overcrowded genre, with an electrically-charged challenge to boot.

Gleylancer

■ While at first glance it appears to be nothing more than a glorified *Thunder Force* clone, this scrolling shoot-'em-up sets itself apart thanks to its advanced projectiles system. The command over the Advanced Busterhawk Gleylancer's surrounding satellites puts you in complete control to conquer this scrolling shooter.



Twinkle Tale

■ *Twinkle Tale* was a Japanese exclusive release that fell into the overly popular run-and-gun genre. Stepping aside from the clichéd themes of army-clad jungle shooters usually found in this category, the mystical narrative and magical style introduced a much more diverse array of scenery and a formidable cast of difficult enemies.

Snow Bros

■ Despite being nothing more than a 16-bit port of a winter themed *Bubble Bobble* clone, *Snow Bros* is one of the most addictive co-operative titles on offer. The overly cutesy visuals coupled with the snowball mechanics make fighting for the top score a frequent Friday night occupation – if you can afford to import it.

Yū Yū Hakusho: Makyō Tōitsusen

■ The only title from Treasure's Mega Drive line up that failed to see a European release was this one. The 2D fighter based upon the *Yū Yū Hakusho* anime took inspiration from both *Street Fighter II* and *Fatal Fury*, merging their greatest aspects into a four player free-for-all frenzy.

TOP RAREST PAL GAMES

Daze Before Christmas

■ Similar to its Super Nintendo counterpart, the limited shelf life of *Daze Before Christmas* saw this festive release only available during the winter season of 1994.

Fatal Fury 2

■ For reasons we'll probably never know, *Fatal Fury 2* became an Australian rental exclusive title that would fail to see a retail release – aside from the few ex-rental copies that slipped through.

The Death And Return Of Superman

■ Before the days of *World Of Warcraft*, Blizzard Entertainment tried its hand at a *Superman* themed *Streets Of Rage* clone – an awful one that would become a desirable rarity for all the wrong reasons.

The Punisher

■ Capcom arrived all too late to add another side scrolling beat-'em-up to their catalogue, leaving *The Punisher* to sell in small quantities, despite being an enjoyable brawler.

Thunder Force III

■ Believe it or not, *Thunder Force III* was actually distributed in Europe. The US version was sold with an additional German text manual, immortalising this shoot-'em-up as quite the rarity.

GET THESE NEXT

Aero The Acrobat 2

■ Stepping aside from his familiar circus theme, the sequel to *Aero The Acrobat* was nothing more than a new level pack for the disappointing platformer. Having failed to engage gamers previously, the updated release of *Aero The Acrobat 2* also sold in small quantities, making it a future rarity for Mega Drive collectors.

Venom/Spider-Man: Separation Anxiety

■ *Venom/Spider-Man: Separation Anxiety* from Acclaim was yet another side-scrolling brawler, but it had nothing to offer over its nearest rivals. Considered by fans to have damaged the Marvel name and strayed much too far from the original source material, this title is nothing more than a rarity.

Addams Family Values

■ *Addams Family Values* was the 1995 tie-in to the feature film of the same name. Although Ocean had all the right ideas with its *Zelda*-inspired *Addams Family* RPG, their execution was a little too late. By the time it arrived, gamers had already moved on to the more compelling adventures offered by newer consoles.

Ecco Jr.

■ In an attempt to captivate a younger audience, Sega not only released the Pico hardware, but also a small selection of child-friendly titles. The Australian exclusive, *Ecco Jr.*, removed the difficulty of its predecessors by granting infinite air and energy, leaving kids the menial task of locating hidden fish among other chores.

The Pirates Of Dark Water

■ This short lived animated series produced by Hanna-Barbera was lucky enough to join the plethora of cartoons that spawned their own videogame. Oddly enough its Super Nintendo release was a far superior side scrolling brawler that left its lacklustre Mega Drive platformer counterpart to sink beneath a sea of poor reviews.

THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN

If you're looking for a rare PAL Mega Drive game that feels genuinely unique, this is the item you should seek out for your collection

What makes it so special?

■ In 1992 Sega teamed up with the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society to name one of its protected dolphins Ecco. To commemorate the partnership, an oversized *Limited Edition Ecco The Dolphin Box Set* was released, containing a unique T-shirt, shared adoption certificate, audio tape, conservation paraphernalia, and of course, the iconic videogame.

Why is it so expensive?

■ Before the days of DLC, limited editions were strictly limited – and this jewel in the crown is no different. The few remaining sets that have survived the last few decades untouched are genuinely rare, verging on endangered. Consequently, Mega Drive collectors will fight to the final bid on the rare occasions when one of these actually surfaces.

What makes it hard to find?

■ As many hunting this elusive rarity will tell you, you'll be lucky to even see the original packaging, never mind its contents. The incredibly hip *Ecco The Dolphin* T-shirt has since become discarded sleepwear, the blue-tac covered adoption certificate remains nowhere to be seen and the audio cassette tape presumably ended up at the local charity shop.

THE MEGA DRIVE GAMES YOU NEED TO OWN

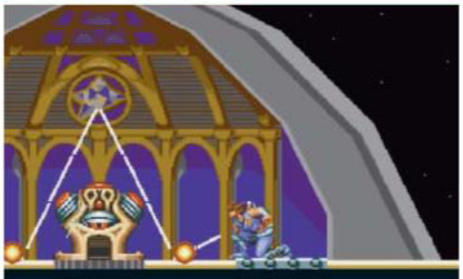
Altered Beast

- [ ] Addams Family Values
- [ ] Addams Family, The
- [ ] Adventure Of Batman & Robin, The
- [ ] Aero The Acro-Bat
- [ ] Afterburner II
- [ ] Aladdin (Disney's)
- [ ] Alex Kidd In The Enchanted Castle
- [ ] Alien 3
- [ ] Alien Soldier
- [ ] Alien Storm
- [ ] Alisia Dragoon
- [ ] Altered Beast
- [ ] Animaniacs
- [ ] Aquatic Games Starring James Pond
- [ ] And The Aquabats
- [ ] Arrow Flash
- [ ] Asterix And The Great Rescue
- [ ] Asterix And The Power Of The Gods
- [ ] Atomic Runner
- [ ] Batman
- [ ] Batman Returns
- [ ] Battletoads
- [ ] Bio Hazard Battle
- [ ] Body Count
- [ ] Bonanza Bros.
- [ ] Bonkers (Disney's)
- [ ] Boogerman: A Pick And Flick Adventure
- [ ] Bram Stoker's Dracula
- [ ] Bubble & Squeak
- [ ] Bugs Bunny in Double Trouble
- [ ] Burning Force
- [ ] Castle Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse
- [ ] Castlevania: The New Generation
- [ ] Cheese Cat-astrophe Starring Speedy Gonzales
- [ ] Chiki Chiki Boys
- [ ] Chuck Rock II: Son Of Chuck
- [ ] Columns
- [ ] Combat Cars
- [ ] Comix Zone
- [ ] Cool Spot
- [ ] Cosmic Spacehead
- [ ] Crüe Ball: Heavy Metal Pinball
- [ ] Daffy Duck In Hollywood
- [ ] Daze Before Christmas
- [ ] Decap Attack
- [ ] Demolition Man
- [ ] Desert Demolition: Road Runner And Wile E. Coyote
- [ ] Desert Strike: Return To The Gulf
- [ ] DJ Boy
- [ ] Donald in Maui Mallard (Disney's)
- [ ] Double Dragon
- [ ] Dr. Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine
- [ ] Dragon Ball Z: L' Appel du Destin
- [ ] Dragon's Fury
- [ ] Dragons' Revenge
- [ ] Dynamite Duke
- [ ] Dynamite Headdy
- [ ] Earthworm Jim
- [ ] Earthworm Jim 2
- [ ] Ecco the Dolphin
- [ ] Ecco: The Tides Of Time
- [ ] Empire Of Steel
- [ ] ESWAT: City Under Siege
- [ ] Eternal Champions
- [ ] Ex-Mutants
- [ ] Exo Squad
- [ ] Faery Tale Adventure, The
- [ ] Fantastic Dizzy
- [ ] Fatal Fury
- [ ] Fatal Fury 2
- [ ] Fatal Labyrinth
- [ ] Fatal Rewind
- [ ] FIFA International Soccer
- [ ] Flashback
- [ ] Flicky
- [ ] (Mis)Adventures Of Flink, The
- [ ] Flintstones, The
- [ ] Forgotten Worlds
- [ ] Gain Ground
- [ ] Galaxy Force II
- [ ] Gauntlet IV
- [ ] General Chaos
- [ ] Ghostbusters
- [ ] Ghouls 'N Ghosts
- [ ] Global Gladiators
- [ ] Golden Axe
- [ ] Golden Axe II
- [ ] Gunstar Heroes
- [ ] Gynoug
- [ ] Havoc
- [ ] Hellfire
- [ ] Herzog Zwei
- [ ] Hook
- [ ] International Sensible Soccer
- [ ] International Superstar Soccer Deluxe
- [ ] James Bond 007: The Duel
- [ ] James Pond II: Codename Robocod
- [ ] Jewel Master
- [ ] Jungle Book, The (Disney's)
- [ ] Jungle Strike: The Sequel To Desert Strike
- [ ] Jurassic Park
- [ ] Jurassic Park: Rampage Edition
- [ ] Kid Chameleon
- [ ] Krusty's Super Fun House
- [ ] Landstalker: The Treasures Of King Nole
- [ ] Last Battle
- [ ] Legend Of Galahad, The
- [ ] Lethal Enforcers
- [ ] Lethal Enforcers II: Gun Fighters

The Punisher

- [ ] Light Crusader
- [ ] Lion King, The (Disney's)
- [ ] Lost World: Jurassic Park, The
- [ ] Lotus II: R.E.C.S
- [ ] Man Overboard!
- [ ] Marko's Magic Football
- [ ] Marsupilami
- [ ] Mazin Wars
- [ ] Mega Bomberman
- [ ] Mega Man: The Wily Wars
- [ ] Mega Turrican
- [ ] Mercs
- [ ] Michael Jackson's Moonwalker
- [ ] Mickey Mania
- [ ] Micro Machines
- [ ] Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament
- [ ] Might and Magic: Gates to Another World
- [ ] Mighty Morphin Power Rangers
- [ ] Mortal Kombat
- [ ] Mortal Kombat II
- [ ] Mr. Nutz
- [ ] Mutant League Football
- [ ] Mutant League Hockey
- [ ] Mystic Defender
- [ ] Normy's Beach Babe-O-Rama
- [ ] Onslaught
- [ ] Ooze, The
- [ ] OutRun
- [ ] Pac-Mania
- [ ] Paperboy
- [ ] Phantasy Star II
- [ ] Phantasy Star III: Generations Of Doom
- [ ] Phantasy Star IV
- [ ] Phelios
- [ ] Pink Goes To Hollywood
- [ ] Pinocchio (Disney's)
- [ ] Pirates of Dark Water, The
- [ ] Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure
- [ ] Power Drive
- [ ] Probotector
- [ ] Psycho Pinball
- [ ] Puggsy
- [ ] Punisher, The
- [ ] QuackShot Starring Donald Duck
- [ ] Rambo III
- [ ] Ranger X
- [ ] Ren & Stimpy Show Presents: Stimpy's Invention, The
- [ ] Revenge Of Shinobi, The

EXTREMELY RARE	VERY RARE	RARE	UNCOMMON	COMMON	VERY COMMON
Games that have less than a few dozen known copies available.	Very hard to come by. Expect to see only a couple of copies per year.	You should be able to source these in a reasonable amount of time.	You won't find them straight away, but you will after a search.	Always just a click away for the average collector.	So common you'll find them in most bundles of games you buy.



Strider

- Risky Woods
- Ristar
- Road Rash
- Road Rash II
- Road Rash 3
- RoboCop Versus The Terminator
- Rock 'N Roll Racing
- Rocket Knight Adventures
- Rolling Thunder 2
- Rolo To The Rescue
- Saturday Night Slam Masters
- Sensible Soccer: European Champions
- Shadow Dancer: The Secret Of Shinobi
- Shadow Of The Beast II
- Shining Force
- Shining Force II
- Shining In The Darkness
- Shinobi III: Return Of The Ninja Master
- Side Pocket
- Simpsons, The: Bart's Nightmare
- Skeleton Krew
- Skitchin'
- Smurfs, The: Travel The World
- Snake Rattle 'n Roll
- Soleil
- Sonic & Knuckles
- Sonic 3D Flickies' Island
- Sonic Spinball
- Sonic The Hedgehog
- Sonic The Hedgehog 2
- Sonic The Hedgehog 3
- Space Harrier II
- Sparkster
- Speedball 2
- Spider-Man/Venom: Maximum Carnage
- Spider-Man Vs. The Kingpin
- Splatterhouse 2
- Spot Goes To Hollywood
- Story Of Thor, The
- Street Racer
- Streets Of Rage
- Streets Of Rage II
- Streets Of Rage 3
- Strider
- Sunset Riders
- Super Fantasy Zone
- Super Hang-On
- Super Hydlide
- Super Skidmarks
- Super Smash T.V.
- Super Street Fighter II: The New Challengers
- Super Thunder Blade V
- Superman: The Man Of Steel
- Sword Of Vermillion
- Sylvester & Tweety in Cagey Capers
- T2: The Arcade Game
- TaleSpin (Disney's)
- Taz-Mania
- Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles: The Hyperstone Heist
- Terminator 2: Judgment Day
- Terminator, The
- Thunder Force II
- Thunder Force III
- Thunder Force IV
- Time Killers
- TinTin In Tibet
- Tiny Toon Adventures: ACME All-Stars
- Tiny Toon Adventures: Buster's Hidden Treasure
- ToeJam & Earl
- ToeJam & Earl In Panic On Funkotron
- Toki: Going Ape Spit
- Toy Story (Disney's)
- Treasure Land Adventure, McDonald's
- True Lies
- Truxton
- Turrican
- Twin Hawk
- Two Crude Dudes
- Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3
- Universal Soldier
- Urban Strike: The Sequel To Jungle Strike
- Vectorman
- Virtua Racing
- Virtual Bart
- Wiz 'n' Liz: The Frantic Wabbit Wescue
- Wolverine: Adamantium Rage
- Wonder Boy III: Monster Lair
- Wonder Boy In Monster World
- World Of Illusion Starring
- Mickey Mouse & Donald Duck
- X-Men 2: Clone Wars
- Zero The Kamikaze Squirrel
- Zero Wing
- Zombies
- Zool: Ninja Of The "Nth" Dimension

Virtual Bart

Collector Q&A

We speak to Stewart Greenwood about his impressive collection.

So what drew you to collecting Sega Mega Drive games and hardware?
I was in a game store looking for a new PS2 game one day and couldn't find anything, when I noticed some really cheap used Mega Drive games, a few of which I remembered wanting when I was a kid. I still had my Mega Drive so I thought 'what the hell', bought them and never looked back!

What does the Mega Drive offer?
It's the arcade feel of the games, they're very atmospheric and the music is always fast and action packed. Mix in a big bag of nostalgia and I'm a happy chap.

How long have you been collecting for?
I'm unsure about this, but at some point in the early Noughties my games stopped just being games that I had accumulated over the years and turned into a serious collection. I'm not sure why either, I don't actually remember deciding that I wanted to collect games, it just kind of happened!

So what, if anything, has eluded you?
A Pioneer CLD A100 LaserActive. I've wanted one for many years now so I could play the Mega LD games but have never had the money available when a decent one has come up for sale. I will get one eventually...

Which one item in your collection could you not live without and why?
Streets Of Rage II, I love that game and although I have it on my phone and PS3 I would never get rid of my original copy that I've had since I was a kid.

What is the most you have spent on a single Mega Drive item and why?
£751 on a blue box copy of *World Championship Soccer 2*, which is a crazy amount to spend on a box I agree, but I needed to have it, I just wasn't happy owning the classics re-release version of the game!

How does your other half feel about your impressive collection?
She quite likes the fact that I have something I am so interested in to keep me busy, but gets annoyed when little piles of games start appearing all over the place!

What advice would you give other readers interested in collecting Mega Drive games?
Do it! It's a great console with so many fun games available for it, and for the most part games are really cheap too. The only real advice I'd give is to buy a Japanese or modified console so you don't exclude yourself from the great imports available.

If you could go back and purchase a single game upon its release, which would it be and why?
Lakers Vs Celtics And The NBA Play Offs. The only PAL Mega Drive game I need a box for, although I'm not sure it actually had a proper release!

* Rarity guide courtesy of RETRO COLLECT More information at retrocollect.com. Sega Genesis courtesy of Gaz Backhouse

CAUTERIZE
11TH PLACE
BIKE
03:20
OFFICER 11
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"THEY" HAVE A HIDEOUT RIGHT HERE IN THE CITY

TOP SCORE
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1600

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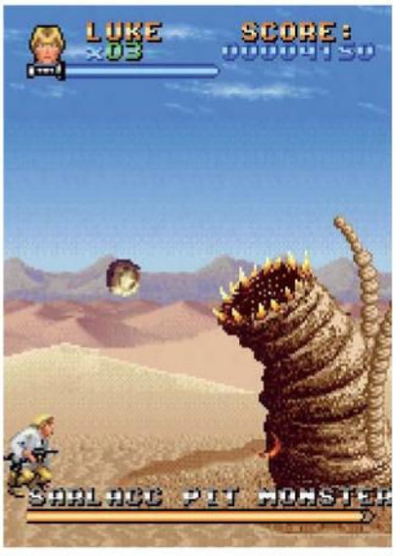
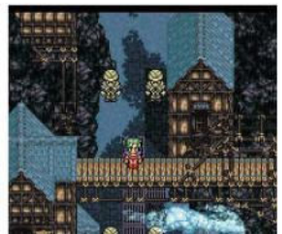
SCORE 00292210
LAP 00
STAGE

The Mega Drive Book
The Mega Drive Book





The Super NES Book

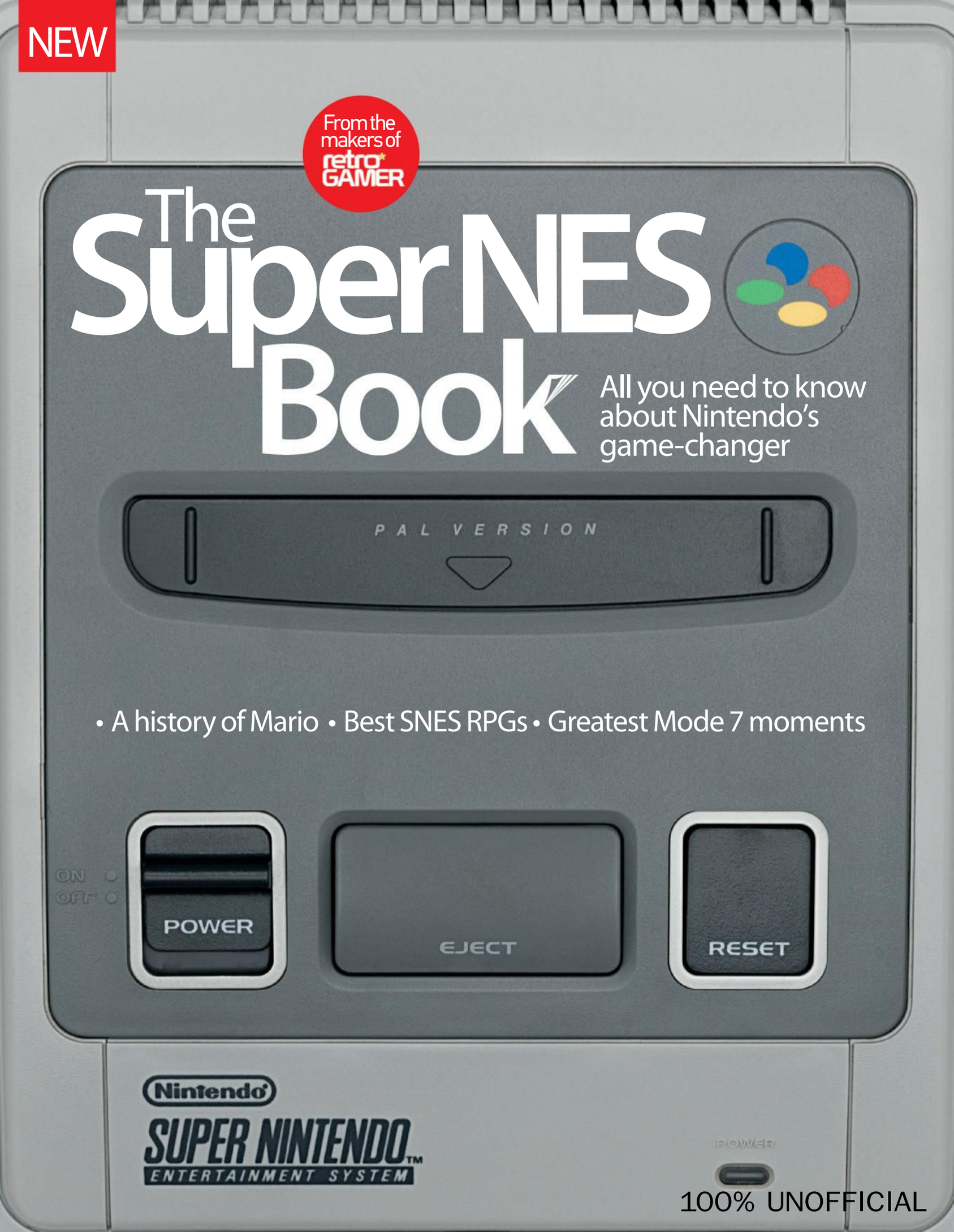
The Super NES Book

NEW

From the makers of retro GAMER

The SuperNES Book

All you need to know about Nintendo's game-changer



100% UNOFFICIAL

Welcome to

The Super NES Book

Nintendo had its work cut out with the release of its Super NES. While it had dominated the 8-bit generation with its NES, Sega already had a 14-month head start with its own 16-bit console, and a host of arcade exclusives from Sega and third-party publishers. Nintendo fought back in fine style and while the fight was far closer than the previous generation, the Super NES eventually pulled ahead as both consoles reached the end of their commercial lives. Assisted by its fabled use of Mode 7 and hits such as *Super Mario World*, *Secret Of Mana*, *Street Fighter 2* and *Axelay*, Nintendo's machine won over the public and it remains an essential console for any collector, delivering a diverse range of games that few other systems of the time could hope to match. With that in mind we've taken this opportunity to celebrate some of the console's finest games. So, pull up a comfy chair and prepare to relive the golden years of the Super NES.

In association with retro GAMER magazine

The Super NES Book

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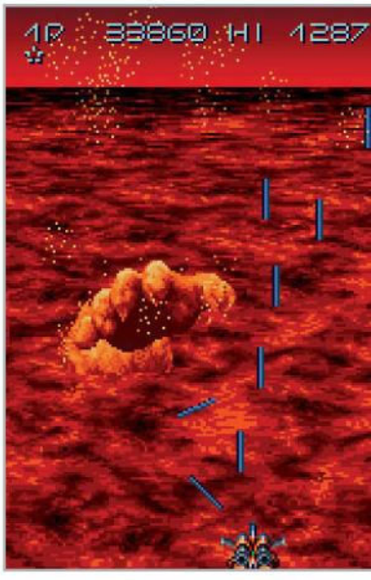

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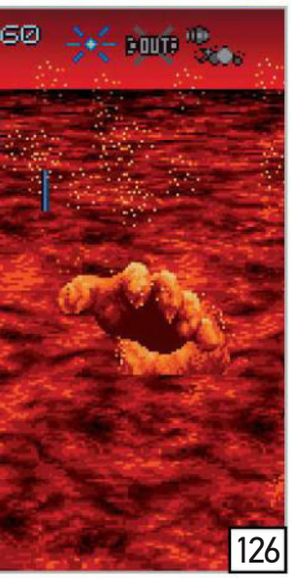

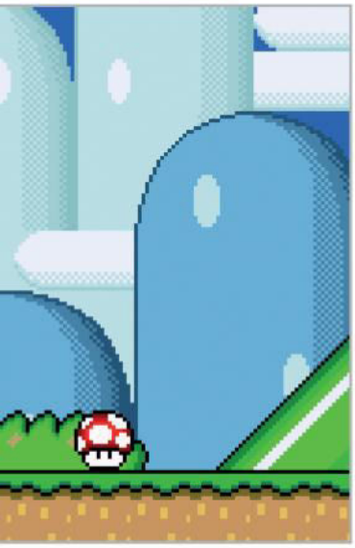

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Year Released: Japan: 1990 USA: 1991 UK: 1992

Original Price: Japan: 25,000 Yen USA: $199 UK: £149.99 (INCLUDING SUPER MARIO WORLD)

Buy it now for: £25+ ($40+)

Associated Magazines: Nintendo Magazine System, Superplay, Total, N-Force, SNES Force

Why the SNES was great… Nintendo's 16 bit powerhouse represents the true "Golden Age" of videogaming as the likes of Konami, Squaresoft and even Nintendo itself have arguably never been on better form than when designing games for this machine. The best SNES releases featured both flawless gameplay and graphics and set a high benchmark for quality entertainment software that, in many cases, endures to this day.

SNES

BY RELEASING THE SUPER NES A YEAR LATER THAN ITS NEAREST RIVALS, NINTENDO FACED THE DAUNTING TASK OF CONVERTING A GENERATION OF GAMERS TO ITS NEW CONSOLE. IT COULD HAVE GONE HORRIBLY WRONG BUT, AS WE REVEAL, ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE IF YOU HAVE THE BEST GAMES

With a NES in thirty per cent of American homes and the word 'Famicom' synonymous with videogames in Japan, Nintendo was understandably reluctant to release a successor to its best selling console and chose to support the ageing 8-bit console for as long as it could. It was, however, only a matter of time before the advance of technology allowed Nintendo's competition to take the lead and by 1988 both NEC's PC Engine and Sega's Mega Drive offered a far more powerful entertainment experience. Nintendo could no longer rest on its laurels and secretly began work on its next 'Family Computer': the Super Famicom.

The 16-bit-system had been developed and designed by Masayuki Uemura, who had spent months attempting to make the Super Famicom backwards compatible with Famicom cartridges but had found that the massive leap in technology had set Nintendo's machine so far in advance of its predecessor that building in Famicom compatibility would have been far too costly. Without backwards compatibility to bridge the transition between consoles, Nintendo would need an irresistible launch line-up to tempt existing Famicom owners to upgrade. Knowing this, Nintendo's president, Hiroshi Yamauchi needed his best man on the job and, as soon as development of *Super Mario Bros 3* was complete, he charged Shigeru Miyamoto and his thirty-man team with the task of exploring the new hardware's game-playing capabilities.

One of the biggest tricks that the hardware had up its sleeve was the now infamous Mode 7: a graphical hardware mode that allowed sprites to zoom in and out and rotate in a way that simulated a 3D depth-of-field effect. Neither the Mega Dive nor PC Engine was

To CD or not CD?

Wishing to exploit the advantages of the growing CD-ROM medium, Nintendo had planned a SNES CD-ROM drive from as early as 1988 and had courted both Sony and Phillips with the proposal. The fruits of those early endeavours were a series of Nintendo licensed games for the Phillips CDI and a prototype add-on from Sony that was eventually developed into the PlayStation we know today. If Nintendo had not backed out of the SNES/PlayStation partnership then the videogame landscape would be unrecognisable and this RetroInspection might tell the tale of a very different console. It is unclear how many games were in development for the SNES-CD but we do know that *Secret Of Mana* was originally CD-based with a planned branching story. The game had to be dramatically cut back to fit on cartridge: a process that was instrumental in convincing Squaresoft to move *Final Fantasy VII* from N64 to PlayStation.

» *Secret Of Mana* started off as a CD title, complete with branching storylines.

» The Japanese packaging evoked a playful image that was missing from the mature design of the console.

» The SNES Jr made it to the USA but its rarity makes it much easier to find the Japanese version.

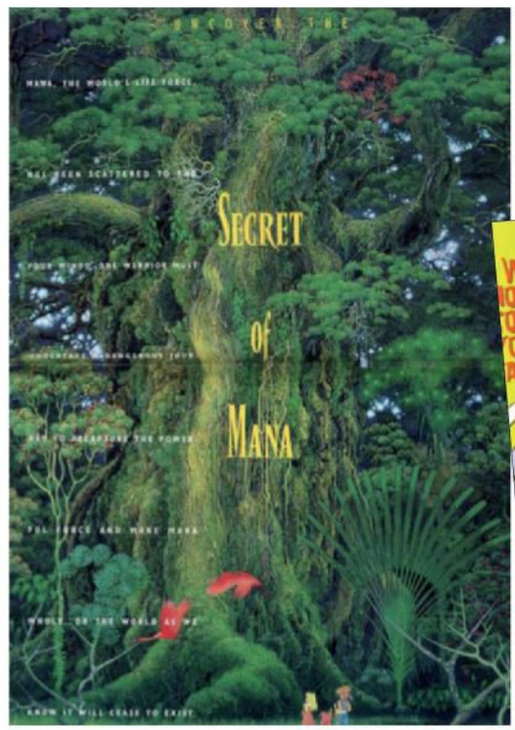
capable of sprite scaling on such a level so Nintendo decided that the first three Super Famicom games would take advantage of the innovative feature. After 15 solid months of R&D, Miyamoto and Co would begin work on *F-Zero*, *Pilotwings* and *Super Mario Bros 4*, which would all use Mode 7 to varying degrees. However, with only ten months until launch day, the team was only able to complete two of the games on time and *Pilotwings* (the most technically demanding of the three) slipped by a month.

By 20 November 1990, Japanese demand for Nintendo's new console had reached fever-pitch and any worries that the machine would fail to entice existing Famicom owners were washed away. Demand for the console was so high that, for example, the Hankyu department store in Osaka had to stop taking preorders only a week after they started. In retrospect the release of the Super Famicom heralded the age of hysteria that has defined every hardware launch to this day. By 20 November, total pre-orders numbered in excess of 1.5 million yet only 300,000 machines shipped. Fearing that several Yakuza groups planned to hijack the Super Famicom shipment, to sell on at artificially inflated prices, Nintendo commenced 'Operation Midnight Shipping' in which the entire batch of 300,000 machines were hauled across Japan in the very early hours of the 20th. Thanks to these dramatic efforts, the launch was a rousing success: the Super Famicom sold out in seconds, even with only two launch titles. Yet when one of those titles was the sequel to the best selling game of all time, success was a certainty. Despite being the least technically demanding of the Super Famicom's launch titles it was *Super Mario Bros 4: Super Mario World* that shifted the machine. *Super Mario World* expanded on its predecessors by offering finely tuned platforming gameplay, beautiful pastel graphics and a staggering 79 levels. The game is still remembered, 16 years on, as the best 2D platform game of all time so it is no surprise that Nintendo relied on it to push sales of their console.

When it came time to introduce the renamed Super Nintendo Entertainment System to the UK (a typical 17 months after the Japanese release) Nintendo made the bold decision to bundle *Super Mario World* with every SNES console. Making for one of the best freebies of all time, *Mario* helped to move many a SNES into British living rooms that summer, but arriving two years after the Mega Drive proved very costly. Sega's black beauty was phenomenally popular in Europe (thanks to its exclusive sports simulations and arcade conversions) and left little room for competition. It wasn't until Christmas of 1992 that the tide truly began to turn, thanks to Capcom's *Street Fighter II*. The original arcade game had spawned a worldwide craze, the likes of which had not been seen since the days of *Pac-Man* and *Space Invaders*, and whichever home console netted a conversion first would benefit from a serious rise in sales. Sure enough, Nintendo managed to snag Capcom's seminal brawler a full year before Sega and stole a significant slice of the UK market in the process. A pattern

» *Super Castlevania* was yet another fantastic release from Konami e of the last games to be released for the Super Famicom in 1999.

» *Donkey Kong Country* used Rare's "Advanced Computer Modelling" to create previously inconceivable visuals on the ageing SNES.



» An enigmatic 2-page advert for *Secret Of Mana* that bravely chose not to use screenshots.

» **Right:** The Super Game Boy allowed GB games to be played on a TV set and expanded the SNES library by thousands. **Right:** An advert for the surprisingly decent SNES conversion of *Street Fighter Alpha 2*.

» **Top Left and right:** By tying the release of *Super Mario World* to the SNES Nintendo ensure great success for their new console. The "Mode 7" effects in *F-Zero* really showed off the power of the Super Nintendo. **Bottom left and right:** *Star Fox* (renamed *Star Wing* in the UK) used extra hardware to push the SNES beyond its limitations. By arriving so late in the console's life, *Yoshi's Island* went tragically unnoticed

was starting to form: although Sega's success was assured by its in-house conversions and its relationship with EA, it was Nintendo's SNES that turned the most heads by continually providing the classiest most desirable games. It started with *Mario* and *Street Fighter* and continued through *Zelda*, *Secret Of Mana*, *Axelay*, *Super Mario Kart* and hundreds of other top-drawer games that would go on to steal the hearts of hardcore and casual gamers alike.

As the years went by and more powerful competitors (like the 3DO and Jaguar) fell by the wayside the SNES' excellent range of software continued to impress with the aid of Nintendo's quality control and, when it became apparent that the console was beginning to show its age, Nintendo built partnerships with third-party developers to find new ways of making their games look next generation even if the original hardware wasn't. The first of these partnerships came about when the UK's Argonaut Software impressed Nintendo by programming the monochrome Game Boy to display full 3D graphics. On the strength of the Game Boy title, two of Argonaut's employees, Giles Goddard and Dylan Cuthbert, achieved what few British coders have and secured positions at Nintendo's Kyoto headquarters. There they developed the "Mario Chip" (later renamed Super FX) a cartridge embedded co-processor that would allow the SNES to display true 3D polygonal visuals for the first time. The first Super FX game they created, with the legendary design talents of Shigeru Miyamoto, was *Star Fox*: an astounding 3D space combat game that wowed SNES owners of 1993, who couldn't believe the console was capable of such graphics. The following year another incredibly talented UK software house found a way to push the SNES beyond its preconceived limits. Rare, who had previously pushed the ZX Spectrum much further than anyone thought possible, had been using Silicon Graphics workstations to test concepts for Nintendo's next console: the Ultra 64. In doing so they discovered a way of using high quality pre-rendered graphics on the humble SNES, which they used to create the beautiful *Donkey Kong Country* and an arcade conversion of the previously Ultra 64 bound *Killer Instinct*. With the PlayStation and the Saturn on the horizon the startling looks of Rare and Argonaut's games must have made the SNES a very tempting reason to not upgrade.

Nintendo's luck couldn't last forever though and, despite pushing the hardware to its limits, sales of the SNES slowed to a trickle in the UK – due in no small part to the globe-consuming success of the PlayStation. Nevertheless, like all good consoles, the SNES was due a last hurrah and got it in the form of *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island*. The gorgeous platform game used a combination of Mode 7 and the Super FX2 chip to pump out some of the best effects the SNES had ever seen and with the classic Nintendo gameplay it became one of the console's most loved titles. The gloriously beautiful platform game proved that the Super Nintendo was far from dead but was sadly lost in the excitement of the new era of 3D games and the hype surrounding *Super Mario 64*. Though it attained outstanding critical acclaim, *Yoshi's Island* was a commercial flop in the UK and was one of the last significant SNES titles to see a European release alongside *Donkey Kong Country 3* and *Street Fighter Alpha 2* in December 1996.

As is typical of Japanese consoles, the native Super Famicom lived on much longer than the Western SNES thanks to continued hardware support and a greater demand for software. The Satellaview (see boxout) broadcasted new Super Famicom games directly into players' homes from 1995 to 2000 and, in doing so, kept the large user base active. A new hardware model was introduced in 1998: the Super Famicom Jr was a smaller, sleeker unit that was affordably priced as an alternative to the N64 and allegedly small enough to be sold in street vending machines. Top quality games continued to be released until 2000 with *Fire Emblem: Thracia 776* and a series of *Picross* titles being the most noteworthy.

Production of the Super Famicom finally ceased in late 2003, which may seem like a good innings until you consider that production of the original Famicom was discontinued in the same year. Regardless, throughout its thirteen-year lifespan, the SNES/Super Famicom achieved widespread success and adoration thanks to Nintendo's willingness to keep the machine alive through groundbreaking hardware expansions and a virtually limitless string of superb releases.

A Room with a Satellaview

The Satellaview has such an unusual history that we could fill a RetroInspection on this intriguing add-on alone. The device allowed the Super Famicom to acquire games from St Giga: a popular Japanese satellite service. At prescheduled times the service would broadcast a chosen game which could then be downloaded onto a flash cart and played "offline". The service was discontinued in 2000 but it is still possible to find flash carts with games saved to them. These extreme rarities should be of particular interest to Nintendo fans as the service featured exclusive versions of classic Nintendo games including *Zelda*, *Famicom Wars*, *Fire Emblem* and *Excitebike*. There was even a text based sequel to *Chrono Trigger* (known as *Radical Dreamers*) and some games, like the satellite version of *A Link To The Past*, could only be played at certain times of day because the Satellaview broadcast live voice-acting into the game.

» Hiroshi Yamauchi was the head of Nintendo for 53 years and was instrumental to its early success.

SNES

PERFECT TEN GAMES

There is a fantastic, diverse range of great games available on the Super Nintendo, which makes putting any selection of games together a near thankless task. We'll happily do it though, as we love Nintendo's 16-bit console. So without further ado, here's our essential choices that deserve to be in every Super Nintendo owner's collection. If you don't own them, you clearly don't love Nintendo's console as much as we do

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SUPER MARIO KART

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
- **CREATED BY:** NINTENDO
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SUPER MARIO BROS

01 We've been playing the original *Super Mario Kart* on and off now for a staggering 20 years and it still remains fresher than a baker's dozen that's just popped out the oven. Meticulously designed circuits, a well-balanced range of weapons – including the greatly missed feather – and impressive visuals proved perfectly that there was so much more to everyone's favourite plumber than simply jumping on wayward Koopas. While the cups provided plenty of fun, it was the stunning time trial mode and sublime multi-player games that kept us constantly going back for just one more go. Thank goodness we weren't around at the time of *Mario Kart*'s release; we'd have never got the damned magazine finished on time!

SUPER METROID

- **RELEASED:** 1994
- **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
- **CREATED BY:** INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** BADVANCE WARS DS

02 *Super Metroid* is a game that works on a variety of levels. While some marvelled at its motherly themes, stunningly created environments and remarkable attention to detail, others were simply impressed with the sheer amount of crap you could blow up in it. Regardless of how you feel about Samus's only 16-bit adventure, there's no denying that *Super Metroid* remains a staggering achievement that perfectly combines the rush of shooting huge bosses with the wonder of exploring vast new areas like no other SNES game around. Little wonder then that it took Nintendo eight years to come up with a sequel that could do it justice.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST

- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
- **CREATED BY:** NINTENDO
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE OCARINA OF TIME

03 There's no denying the superiority of *Ocarina Of Time*, but *A Link To The Past* remains a wonderfully accomplished adventure that deserves to sit proudly in every SNES owner's collection. Every dungeon you explore is crafted to perfection, and while they start off easy, you'll soon be scratching your head over Miyamoto's deviously designed puzzles. The many weapons you discover are well balanced and every encountered boss is a masterstroke in design. Then of course you have the two unique worlds that Link can eventually switch between, thus making an already sprawling game even larger. Quite simply one of the finest 16-bit adventures ever made.

CONTRA III: THE ALIEN WARS

- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **PUBLISHED BY:** KONAMI
- **CREATED BY:** KONAMI
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SUPER CASTLEVANIA IV

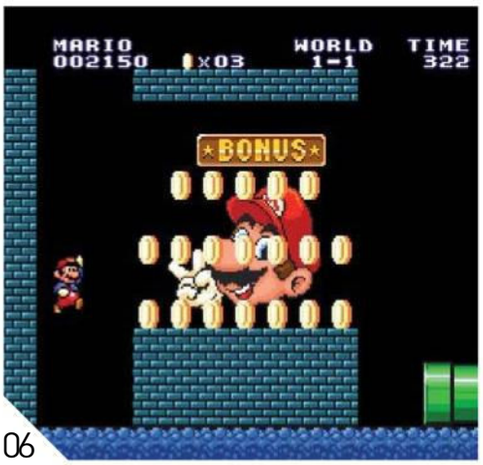
04 Konami released some outstanding titles for Nintendo's 16-bit wonder, but this cracking effort from 1992 is arguably one of its best efforts. Each level is a rollercoaster ride of destruction and featured the SNES hardware on fine form. Sprites are full of detail, the game's many bosses a joy to behold, and there's a ridiculous amount of Mode 7 trickery going on. Add in a fantastic, stomping soundtrack, an awesome array of different weapons and some groovy overhead levels (that can be rotated with the left and right triggers) and you have a run-and-gun title that would be essential on any format.

AXELAY

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHED BY:** KONAMI
- **CREATED BY:** KONAMI
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** GRADIUS III

05 There's a host of great shooters available for the SNES, but few can compare to the brilliance that is Konami's stunning *Axelay*. From its quasi-3D levels to its utterly amazing music, every moment of *Axelay* is exhilarating to play through. While the level design and available weapons are worthy of praise, it's the immense, striking bosses the game constantly throws at you that truly astound. Huge metallic spiders, colossal ED-209 styled mechs and a gigantic lava creature are just a few of the mayors you have to deal with and each is breath-taking to behold. Why's it's never been released on the GBA we'll never know…

05



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SUPER MARIO ALL-STARS

» **RELEASED:** 1993
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
» **CREATED BY:** NINTENDO
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE

06 What's better than three classic *Mario* NES outings on one cartridge? Why, three *Mario* NES games with improved aesthetics and a fourth exclusive title that had only originally appeared in Japan of course!

All-Stars' triple whammy of *Super Mario Bros 1*, *2* and *3* made it incredible value for money and were great examples of taking old games and updating them for a newer platform. Add in *Super Mario Bros: The Lost Levels*, which was effectively a tougher version of the original game and allowed you to choose from either brother and you had an amazingly comprehensive package. Finally, if you bought the version that came boxed with a SNES you received *Super Mario World* on the cartridge. Bargain!

CHRONO TRIGGER

» **RELEASED:** 1995
» **PUBLISHED BY:** SQUARESOFT
» **CREATED BY:** SQUARESOFT
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** FINAL FANTASY X

07 It would have been all too easy to go with Squaresoft's *Secret Of Mana*, so we've decided to focus on this little beauty instead.

While Squaresoft's epic RPG borrows plenty of ideas from the *Final Fantasy* series, you just can't help but be impressed by the sheer amount of love that has gone into crafting this astonishing RPG. Although the central storyline is fairly predictable, it soon begins to twist and turn all over the place and introduces plenty of memorable characters and sub plots. The combat system is a joy to use and the use of sound throughout is outstanding. It all combines to create one of the most engrossing RPGs we've ever played. Utterly essential.

STREET FIGHTER ALPHA II

» **RELEASED:** 1996
» **PUBLISHED BY:** CAPCOM
» **CREATED BY:** CAPCOM
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SUPER GHOULS 'N GHOSTS

08 Capcom's second *Alpha* title was released late in the SNES's life, and as a result, was sadly overlooked by a great many gamers who had moved on to the newer, flashier consoles.

Their loss was our gain however, as it's easily one the best brawlers on Nintendo's 16-bit wonder. Great looking sprites, a solid roster of characters, new moves, plenty of additional animation and thumping good gameplay made *Alpha II* a winner. We've no idea why the first game didn't appear on the SNES, but Capcom more than made up for it with this excellent sequel. An outstanding fighter that deserves to be in everyone's SNES collection.

PILOTWINGS

» **RELEASED:** 1993
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
» **CREATED BY:** NINTENDO
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** DONKEY KONG

09 The Mode 7 chip was used in countless numbers of SNES games, but never was its appearance more noticeable than in the wondrous *Pilotwings*.

Taking control of a budding pilot, all the game required you to do was master licences for four different events: Skydiving, Rocketbelt, Light Plane and Hang Glider. While some of *Pilotwings*' events could be tricky to get to grips with, the elation you felt when they were finally mastered more than made up for it. Thanks to the excellent Mode 7 effects the sense of scale you encountered as you flew through the air was breath-taking, and wait until you finally get to use the hang glider… Marvellous.

UMIHARA KAWASE

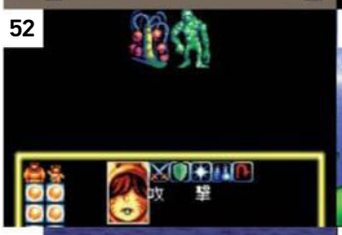
» **RELEASED:** 1994
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NHK
» **CREATED BY:** TNN
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SHIJOU SAIKYOU LEAGUE SERIE A: ACE STRIKER

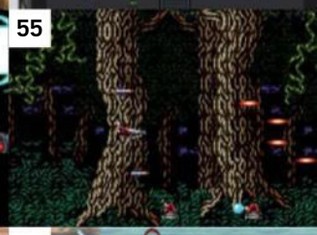
10 It seems only fair to put at least one quirky Japanese title in the top ten, so our vote goes to the delightful *Umihara Kawase*.

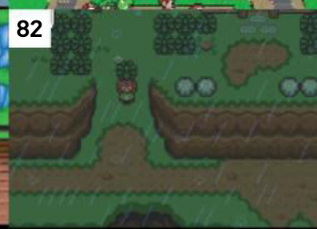
Taking control of an adorably cute little girl, the aim of each stage is simple – avoid the bizarre fishy enemies and reach the door on each exit. Of course, said exit is often out of reach, and with your little tyke not being that great a jumper she has to rely on a handy elastic rope to get her around. Think *Bionic Commando* but with some decent rope physics thrown into the mix and you have a good idea of what to expect.

SNES and the rest...

Nintendo's 16-bit console was an absolute powerhouse of a machine and supported an amazing array of different genres. From hit arcade conversions to the incredibly obscure, the SNES had something for everyone







01 ACTRAISER
02 SUPER GHOULS 'N' GHOSTS
03 THE FIREMEN
04 KILLER INSTINCT
05 DONALD DUCK
06 SUPER BOMBERMAN
07 THE ADVENTURES OF BATMAN & ROBIN
08 MAGIC SWORD
09 CONTRA III: THE ALIEN WAR
10 GANBARE GOEMON 2
11 SHADOWRUN
12 TERRANIGMA
13 MEGA MAN X
14 CANNON FODDER
15 SUPER METROID
16 POCKY & ROCKY
17 DONKEY KONG COUNTRY
18 JOE & MAC
19 PILOTWINGS
20 TETRIS BATTLE GAIDEN
21 SUPER MARIO ALL-STARS
22 ALADDIN
23 BREATH OF FIRE
24 GOKUJOU PARODIUS
25 STUNT RACE FX
26 EYE OF THE BEHOLDER
27 SIM CITY
28 STARWING
29 FIRST SAMURAI
30 ARKANOID: DOH IT AGAIN
31 BLACK THORNE
32 PRINCE OF PERSIA
33 CACOMA KNIGHT
34 SUPER STREET FIGHTER 2: TURBO 'HYPER FIGHTING
35 THE ADDAMS FAMILY
36 FINAL FIGHT GUY
37 MICKY MANIA
38 SUPER MARIO WORLD
39 CYBERNATOR
40 LEMMINGS
41 ACTRAISER
42 BATTLETOADS & DOUBLE DRAGON: THE ULTIMATE TEAM
43 THE CHAOS ENGINE
44 MR DO!
45 SECRET OF MANA
46 SUPER SMASH TV
47 DARIUS TWIN
48 SUPER TENNIS
49 UNIRALLY
50 ASTERIX & OBELIX
51 SUPER CASTLEVANIA IV
52 BURAI
53 PLOK!
54 R-TYPE III: THE THIRD LIGHTNING
55 THUNDER SPIRITS
56 UMIHARA KAWASE
57 EARTHBOUND
58 INTERNATIONAL SUPERSTAR SOCCER
59 RENDERING RANGER
60 SUPER MARIO RPG: LEGEND OF THE SEVEN STARS
61 U.N. SQUADRON
62 THE LORD OF THE RINGS
63 TOP GEAR
64 AXELAY
65 DEMON'S CREST
66 NINJA GAIDEN TRILOGY
67 SUPER PUNCH-OUT!!
68 F-ZERO
69 SUPER STAR WARS
70 TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES IV: TURTLES IN TIME
71 ART OF FIGHTING 2
72 CAPTAIN COMMANDO
73 SUPER MARIO KART
74 GRADIUS III
75 BATTLE CARS
76 SUPER MARIO WORLD 2: YOSHI'S ISLAND
77 THE SIMPSONS: BART'S NIGHTMARE
78 BIO METAL
79 THE LEGEND OF THE MYSTICAL NINJA
80 EARTHWORM JIM
81 CLAY FIGHTER 2
82 THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST
83 SUPER STREET FIGHTER 2: THE NEW CHALLENGERS
84 THE KING OF DRAGONS
85 MICRO MACHINES
86 DAZE BEFORE CHRISTMAS
87 WILD GUNS

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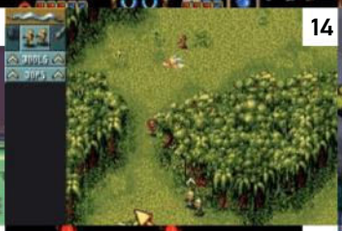
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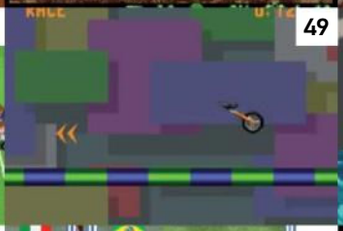
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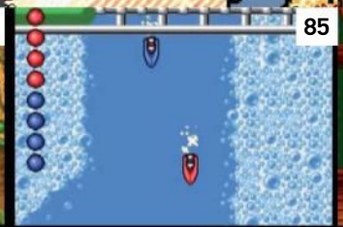
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RESTAURANT

MR. VIDEO GAME

The Complete History of Mario

Mario has become one of the most recognisable videogame mascots of all time and has starred in two of the Super Nintendo's best platformers. With that in mind we felt it was only fair that we looked back at his many gaming achievements

To fully appreciate why Mario is still the videogame industry's most recognised, popular and enduring character, you have to look back to the early days of videogames. Mario remains the poster child for a time where everything about them felt fresh, innovative and new, and these newfangled virtual worlds sought only to be linked to ours through the computers and consoles that projected them and the talented visionaries who imagined them. With realism and trends now sitting where fun and creativity once ruled, today's industry is looking a much different place to one that Nintendo was helping rebuild back in the Eighties.

With every familiar-looking sandbox RPG-lite shooter that finds release, it becomes ever apparent that this industry has, in many ways, started to fold in on itself. The insane budgets required to build the games of today mean that now only a small handful of developers and publishers have the financial means to call the shots, game genres seem to be melding together, and despite now being able to utilise gazillions of colours, games are looking a little less colourful. Why the Wii currently stands as the triumphant console of this generation, and *Super Mario Galaxy 2* has scooped universal acclaim, should be obvious to anyone who enjoyed playing videogames throughout the Eighties and Nineties. Nintendo has proven, once again, that fun and creativity are king.

It's for this reason why most gamers can instantly recall the first time they ever saw Mario in action. He takes them back to an evergreen era for videogames, a time with which he has now become synonymous. For many of you reading this, we suspect that your first experience came from playing *Donkey Kong* in arcades, or on home computers and consoles. At this inaugural point in his career, Mario was known by the more literal-sounding name of Jumpman, played a bit of an antihero, and worked as a carpenter instead of the heroic plumber we all know him as today. However, while Mario's personality, name and occupation would come to change quite quickly following his gaming debut in 1981, the distinct look of the character was settled on almost immediately by his creator, Shigeru Miyamoto, and has only really ever been refined, never changed, over the years.

As was the practice in the early days of game design, Mario was borne out from the technical limitations of his time. The character was given his signature flat cap owing to the fact that it would save Miyamoto the headache of animating hair, a large nose to make him look instantly more human, bright red coveralls to help him stand out against *Donkey Kong*'s dark backgrounds, and a moustache instead of a mouth for similar reasons. But Mario's creation also came about through an

Super Mario Moments

1985 SUPER MARIO BROS

1986 SUPER MARIO BROS THE LOST LEVELS

1988 (USA) SUPER MARIO BROS 2

1988 SUPER MARIO BROS 3

1989 SUPER MARIO LAND

1990 SUPER MARIO WORLD

1995 SUPER MARIO WORLD 2: YOSHI'S ISLAND

1996 SUPER MARIO 64

2002 SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE

2006 NEW SUPER MARIO BROS

2007 SUPER MARIO GALAXY

2009 NEW SUPER MARIO BROS WII

2011 SUPER MARIO 3D LAND

2013 SUPER MARIO 3D WORLD

Professions of a Plumber

The versatile hero has appeared in a string of occupational cameos for Nintendo over the years...

Carpenter
Donkey Kong 1981
■ Mario's first ever job was as a mallet-wielding carpenter in *Donkey Kong*. It's likely that his profession was inspired by the everyman-type scenarios on which Nintendo based many of its Game & Watch titles.

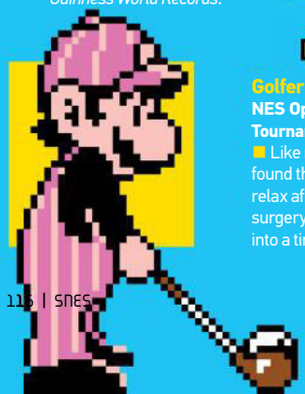
Plumber
Mario Bros 1983
■ After a two-year stint working as a carpenter, Mario turned his talents to plumbing – as well as the odd bit of pest extermination too – for *Mario Bros*. He kept the role for the subsequent *Super Mario Bros* series.

Umpire
Tennis 1984
■ Mario earned extra cash at weekends working as a tennis umpire. Later in life he decided to take up the sport himself when he realised that more money was to be had playing than interfering.

Referee
Punch-Out!! 1987
■ Following a successful spell as a tennis umpire, Mario caught the eye of the Nintendo Boxing Commission and was approached to work as a referee in the Famicom/NES version of *Punch-Out!!*.

Doctor
Dr Mario 1990
■ Making a mint working as a boxing ref, Mario left labouring to go to medical school. It took him just two years to complete his doctorate – earning him a place in *Guinness World Records*.

Golfer
NES Open Tournament Golf 1991
■ Like most doctors, Mario found that the best way to relax after a busy day in surgery was to smash a ball into a tiny hole.



MARIO MEMORIES

Jim Bagley
Classic Spectrum coder
I first saw Mario in the local arcade halls in New Brighton roughly around 1981 when *Donkey Kong* was released. *Donkey Kong* is and always will be a classic, and a great game to boot, but I can't help but admire so many other *Mario* games. *Super Mario Bros* is another fantastic *Mario* game that even to this day I like to play – even though my nephew completed it before I did! And what favourite *Mario* list would be complete without *Mario Kart*? I loved the N64 version the most, because my nephew, niece, sister and I used to play it at the weekends with riotous laughter, especially when zapping someone on the jump in Wario Stadium. And I can't go without saying *New Super Mario Bros*. I also loved it, again, because of the original features, like being able to grow huge and sprint through the level. Out of those four, those being my favourites, if I had to choose one... I'm not sure I can! They all have a huge place in my heart. Why has Mario remained so enduring? Well because he's constantly re-inventing himself, changing with the times, and because Shigeru Miyamoto is simply a genius.

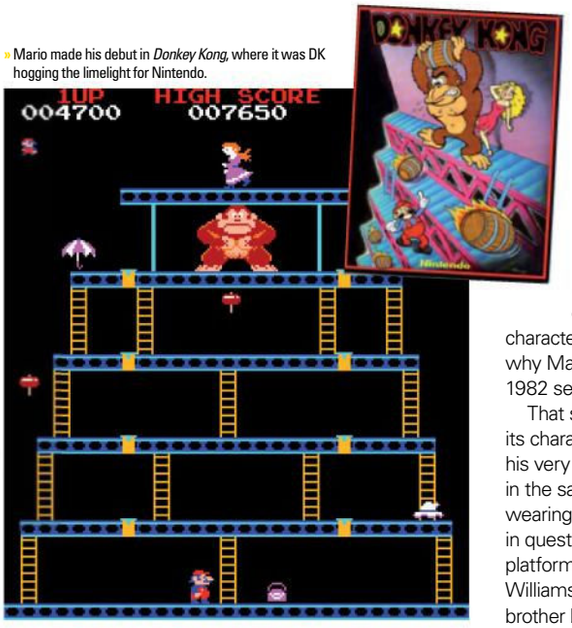
John Carmack
Co-Founder id Software
I have followed Mario since the *Donkey Kong* days, and id Software was pretty much launched on the merits of an internal clone of *Super Mario Bros 3*. I was away for a while after *Super Mario 64*, but the last few years with my son have brought me back into the fold – we just collected our 66th star on *Super Mario Galaxy 2* last night, and we have gone back through all the old games. Still fun after all these years. Domo arigato, Miyamoto-san!

Kevin Toms
Creator of Football Manager
I remember my first recollection of Mario being on the original Nintendo cartridge machine. Squat, cute character, red hat comes to mind. Probably I would go for *Mario Kart* on the Nintendo 64 as my *Mario* game. His lasting appeal is down to the personality he puts across: an upbeat, likable, jolly man. Most people would get on with someone like that. So he annoys no one!

■ Hudson Soft released two peculiar variants of *Mario Bros* for Japanese home computers.

■ The original *SMB* still plays great today. We should know – we played it yesterday.

» Mario made his debut in *Donkey Kong*, where it was DK hogging the limelight for Nintendo.



element of luck and good fortune – although it probably didn't seem that way to Nintendo at the time.

'I'll save yer, lady!'

Before *Donkey Kong* was even considered, Shigeru Miyamoto had aims to create a new arcade game starring the characters from the popular King Features Syndicate cartoon, *Popeye*. But when Nintendo failed to obtain the licence, Miyamoto was forced to come up with three central characters of his own. And, after taking pretty obvious inspiration from the 1933 stop-motion monster classic, *King Kong*, he came up with the characters Jumpman, Lady and Donkey Kong to substitute the roles of Popeye, Olive Oyl and Bluto, respectively.

When the time came for *Donkey Kong* to ship to North America, however, it was decided that Jumpman should be renamed during the localisation process. Even then, Nintendo's intention was to turn Mario into a mascot-type character by having him appear in many of Miyamoto's subsequent videogames. With this idea in mind, the first new name that Nintendo would settle on for Jumpman was 'Mr Video'. It was a name clearly derived from Nintendo's first ever gaming mascot, Mr Game & Watch.

However, in what became one of the videogame industry's most bizarre anecdotes, Jumpman's name would change once again. The tale goes that, at the time when Nintendo of America (NOA) was trying to gain a foothold in North America, it was renting a warehouse from an Italian construction tycoon named Mario Segale. Segale was said to have looked remarkably similar to Jumpman, and when NOA's president at the time, Minoru Arakawa, realised the coincidence, Jumpman was nicknamed Mario and the name stuck. What makes the story all the more ironic is the fact that Mario Segale's business was construction, an industry that played a prominent role in the look of *Donkey Kong*'s stages. We can neither confirm nor deny whether Segale once owned a giant gorilla that he would occasionally mistreat, though we're guessing that it was highly unlikely.

With the character renamed, Lady rechristened Pauline, and the localisation process complete, Nintendo pushed *Donkey Kong* out onto the US market, where it became a huge success. And with the millions of dollars it earned, the company was able to fund development of its first true videogame console, the Famicom. But it was Donkey Kong, not Mario, who was gaining the most celebrity for Nintendo. Despite the fact that the big dumb ape was assigned the role of big dumb antagonist in *Donkey Kong*, his domineering presence and cartoon qualities made him a clear standout character in the game. And it is perhaps for this reason why Mario was then made to play villain in the game's 1982 sequel, *Donkey Kong Jr.*

That said, Nintendo, obviously not wanting to turn its character into an out-and-out baddie, did give Mario his very own game in the same year, plonking him back in the saddle of hero and gifting him a green coverall-wearing brother called Luigi into the bargain. The game in question, *Mario Bros*, was a single-screen action platformer that looked and played similar to the earlier Williams arcade game *Joust*. It saw Mario and his brother battle through 'phases' of enemy attacks inside a New York sewer, and was the first game to ever depict the brothers as plumbers – it's believed that this was done simply to explain the game's culvert setting. However, with its premise finding the pair trying to prevent an infestation of insect and reptilian pests escaping into the city, the brothers are clearly acting more like exterminators in the game. Nevertheless, as well as portraying the brothers as plumbers, *Mario Bros* also introduced a few common enemy types too, such as Shellcreepers – a precursor to Koopa Troopas – and the annoying spike-shelled foes, the Spinies. It also established the idea of having the brothers collect coins through bonus rounds, as well as the concept of brick-punching and unconscious-enemy toe-punting, all of which would become staples of the *Mario* series.

» Who can forget this trick in World 1-2? Who was it that said cheating doesn't pay? Someone who'd never played *Super Mario Bros*, clearly.

Mario Bros received a lukewarm arcade reception, certainly nothing in the same league as *Donkey Kong*, but later proved to be a popular release for the NES in North America. Two variants of the game were also developed by Hudson Soft, under licence from Nintendo. Released exclusively on Japanese home computers, the games featured all-new original stages and gameplay mechanics. The first, *Mario Bros Special*, was an interesting update of the original game that saw players having to fight their way to exit points at the top of each stage, while the second title, *Punch Ball Mario Bros*, was a quirky dodgeball-inspired iteration that saw the brothers punching balls at their subterranean foes and hitting switches. Hudson Soft also later released its own version of *Super Mario Bros*. Titled *Super Mario Bros Special*, this unfairly punishing home computer version featured all-new levels, hair-pulling level design and maddening flick-screen scrolling. In fact, the dodgy scrolling mars the experience so much that it shows just how important a factor scrolling actually played in *Super Mario Bros*' ultimate success.

But we're jumping ahead of ourselves a bit here, as Mario hadn't quite gone 'super' just yet. In fact, while it's debatable that Miyamoto dabbled with the idea of giving Mario enhanced powers in *Mario Bros* by finally giving him the ability to survive a fall – he wasn't capable of bending his knees in *Donkey Kong* – it wasn't really until the release of *Super Mario Bros* in 1985 that the legendary game designer gave his creation real super powers. Before reaching this watershed moment, though, the character could be seen busily living up to his 'Mr Video' duties. The multipurpose butterball could be seen popping up in a bonus stage in the NES game *Pinball* that same year, guest appearing as an unshaven umpire in *Tennis* (1984), and influencing the look of *Golf*'s (1984) moustachioed golfer Ossan, a character

MARIO MEMORIES

Eugene Jarvis
Arcade legend

My first recollection of Mario was in *Donkey Kong*. The character was ridiculous. Why am I a carpenter trying to rescue a princess from King Kong? *Super Mario Bros* is the greatest videogame of all time. It is etched in my brain like a phosphorescent cattle brand. Mario is the video star. He has been flogged and baked into the collective memory of humanity for 30 years. When the last cockroach is dead he will dance on the grave.

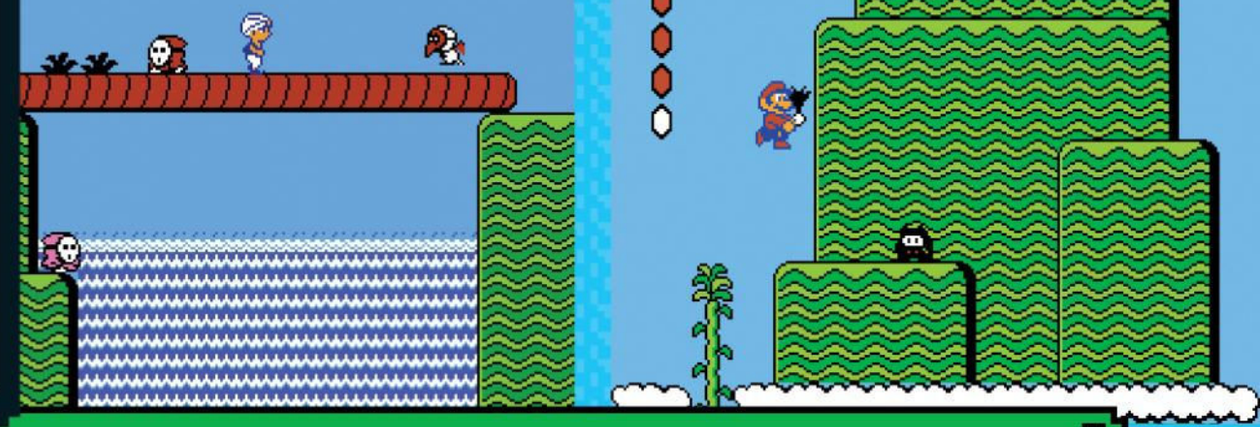
Jamie Woodhouse
Creator of Qwak!

I'm fairly sure my first experience of Mario was *Mario Bros* on the NES; I remember it not scrolling, just a static screen, with lots of turtles that go into pipes in the bottom corners of the screen, then coming out of pipes in the top corners. Characters were all simple, yet fun-looking, with a cutesy round feel to them. I think my all-time favourite *Mario* game is probably *Super Mario Land* on the Game Boy: simple, fun gameplay, not too complicated graphically, and of course, it was portable! I think maybe Mario's appeal is down to the personality of the character; I mean, he's not really a violent kind of dude, is he? And he's only there in the first place because he's trying to sort out the big bad boss or rescue his girlfriend – or was that the other game, the one with the big monkey? So I guess, maybe because he's not too violent, and he's there for a good reason, people maybe relate to that. Also, it can't hurt having the Nintendo marketing department on your side!

MARIO MEMORIES

Jon Hare
Co-Founder Sensible Software

First time I saw Mario was *Donkey Kong* in the arcades in about 1980. I didn't focus on the character much, to be honest – nothing that special. I thought the monkey was the best thing in the game. My all-time favourite *Mario* game has to be *Mario Golf* on the N64. It just has the most perfectly tuned learning curve ever. I spent a whole year trying to win every trophy and kept missing the final one by just one shot. Next best titles would be *Mario 64* and *Mario Kart*. I think Mario endures because he is a really good everyman character, funny but not too irritating, and he has an army of fellow characters that add a lot to him. Miyamoto is the only game designer that I look up to.



If you think this game looks a lot like *SMB2*, that's because 95 per cent of it is.

MARIO MEMORIES

Scott Miller
Founder of Apogee Software

I first remember Mario playing *Donkey Kong*, of course! When I first discovered this game in an arcade I knew it had something special about it, interesting characters, unique gameplay, variety, and it was a deeply polished game. From the get-go I knew it was the start of a new era, but no one could have guessed the staying power of this squatty plumber!

Alex Trowers
Designer of classic Bullfrog games

I suppose the first time I saw Mario in action was in *Super Mario Bros*, but that's only because the Mario in *Donkey Kong* was called Jumpman. I found *SMB* a bit meh – despite the knocking-things-over-from-underneath mechanic and a two-player option, the whole thing felt a little repetitive. I loved *Donkey Kong* in the arcades, though, and the ColecoVision version, which was the scene of some epic high-score battles between my brother, my mum and I. I can also remember a version of *Super Mario 3* on an old Nintendo Play Choice 10 machine in a local kebab shop. That was entertaining. Suddenly Mario could do all manner of interesting things and that was quite appealing. My favourite *Mario* game is a toss-up between *Super Mario World* on the Super Famicom and *Super Mario 64* on the N64. Some guys from Imagineer brought a Super Famicom over around the time of the Japanese launch and lent it to us. It had two games: *F-Zero* and *Super Mario World*. We played them both pretty religiously, to the extent that we managed to overheat and blow up the console.

Super Mario World was one of the first games I completed in Japanese despite there being a whole ton of stuff that Mario could do. Of course, I couldn't read any of the hints, meaning I missed the one about being able to throw shells up in the air. This meant that to complete the final boss, I had to get the cape on an earlier level and make it through the last castle without getting hit. Once [there], I had to wait on one side of the screen for him to drop a Koopa before running along, jumping, hitting the thing and grabbing the shell, before using the momentum to fly up to the top of the screen and dropping the shell on him from above. I remember thinking it was tricky at the time [and] put it down to it being the end of the game.

John Romero
Co-Founder of id Software

The first time I saw Mario in action, I was at an arcade in Roseville, California, called Supercade. It was a weekend in 1981 and my friend Robert was with me. At this time in 1981, new games were showing up every week. The arcades were the most exciting places in the world. And in this particular arcade, this particular weekend, was a new game called *Donkey Kong*. We went up to the game, dropped in our quarters, and lost ourselves for several hours. When the smoke cleared, we had found a new favourite game and a favourite carpenter named Jumpman, who would be renamed in four years to the familiar name: Mario. We loved Mario's pixelated figure, his cute animations and cuter sound effects. His job was to rescue the princess and put out fire with a mallet. We loved the ridiculousness of it, and it fit in perfectly with the extreme abstractness of games of that time. For me, *Super Mario 3* was the pinnacle. It was just so epic. That game pushed the original NES to the extreme. The cartridge was packed to the limit with data – the game was huge at the time. And it took a while to play through. I was playing it in my Gamer's Edge office next to John Carmack as he coded.

often mistaken for Mario, owing to his stark resemblance to Nintendo's mascot.

Super Mario... Finally

Super Mario Bros was, in many respects, the natural next step for the main series to take. It took the popular 'rescue the girl' premise of *Donkey Kong*, applied it to the theme and two-player mode – albeit not simultaneous this time – introduced in *Mario Bros*, and then stretched the gameplay into a revolutionary side-scrolling platform game. Set in the fantasy fungal world of the Mushroom Kingdom, the 'Super' prefix came from the brothers' peculiar reaction to ingesting magic mushrooms, which took the form of power-ups in the game. Eating a mushroom would cause Mario and Luigi to grow in size, this growth spurt essentially acting like a shield but at the cost of making them easier for enemies to hit. And while in this state the eating of a Fire Flower power-up would make the plumbers truly super-powered, dressing them in lustrous white overalls and giving them the ability to lob fireballs.

Speaking in 1991's *Mario Mania Player's Guide*, Miyamoto revealed how the brothers' iconic growth spurt ability in the game came about: "We developed programming techniques that allowed us to create a larger character than we originally thought possible. At first, we planned to make the game so that the player was always 'big' Mario, but eventually, we came up with the idea for the power-up mushroom to make Mario Super."

Super Mario Bros was praised for its innovative gameplay, great visuals, catchy music, super-smooth scrolling, and wealth of secrets to discover – the most notable of which saw Mario actually breaking out of his own videogame in World 1-2; a truly mind-bending concept at the time, made even more impressive by the fact that doing so rewarded the player with the opportunity to warp to later levels in the game.

Selling over 40 million copies, *Super Mario Bros*' popularity can be largely attributed to the success of the Famicom/NES, and thus for also playing a key role in helping to resurrect the console industry in North America following its crash in 1983. In fact, *Super Mario Bros* currently stands as the second bestselling videogame of all time, only topped by *Wii Sports Resort* last year, demonstrating the sheer impact that this single game had on the games industry.

But *Super Mario Bros* wasn't the only *Mario* title released in 1985. The little-known NES game *Wrecking Crew* saw Mario continue in the tradition of his earlier arcade-style games. Rearmed with his trusty carpenter's hammer, and accompanied by Luigi, the game was a fun mix of smash-'em-up and puzzle

game. Capping the brothers' ability to jump, *Wrecking Crew* saw Mario and Luigi race around, smashing bricks and pillars in an advantageous order so as to clear each stage of everything destructible. It even came with a level designer. But while a neat concept, it fell into obscurity in the shadow of *Super Mario Bros.*

Sequel Sequel Panic

Now if there's one thing that Nintendo was seen to struggle with during the 8-bit era, it was sequels. While *Donkey Kong Jr* was an enjoyable enough successor, it really wasn't a patch on the tight, engaging and insanely addictive gameplay of *Donkey Kong*. And while *Zelda II: The Adventure Of Link* had its good moments, to this day it's still deemed by many fans to be one of the weakest entries in the series. The *Super Mario Bros* series is no different and follows this peculiar pattern.

"Mario played a key role in resurrecting the American industry"

Owing to *Super Mario Bros*' success, Nintendo was understandably keen to capitalise on the game's popularity and so quickly pushed out an expert version exclusively for the Famicom Disk System to satiate demand. Released in 1986 as *Super Mario Bros 2* in Japan, it was a single-player game only, with players given the choice of picking between a 'Mario game' or 'Luigi game', and the brothers were given different attributes: Mario had better traction; Luigi a higher jump. On top of this, the difficulty level was also increased, and the game made more challenging through the inclusion of poisonous mushrooms and more aggressive enemies. But when the game came to ship to North America, NOA stressed its concerns that the game wasn't different enough to be deemed a true sequel, and would be too challenging for Western gamers. Consequently, Nintendo was forced to do some rapid troubleshooting, and this led it to re-skin another platform game by Miyamoto and his team titled *Yume Kojo: Doki Doki Panic*.

Released for the Famicom Disk System in Japan, *Doki Doki* garnered modest sales, likely owing to its Disk System exclusivity, and so Nintendo had the brainwave of switching the game's four Arabian heroes with Mario, Luigi, Toad and Princess Toadstool (Peach) and repackaging it as *Super Mario Bros 2* in the West. Without the aid of the internet back then, a very large proportion of the planet would be none the wiser of this cheeky game swap. Of course, we later got the chance to test our skills on the Japanese sequel when it was remade as *Super Mario Bros: The Lost Levels* for the 1993 *Super Mario All-Stars* compilation pack on the Super Nintendo.

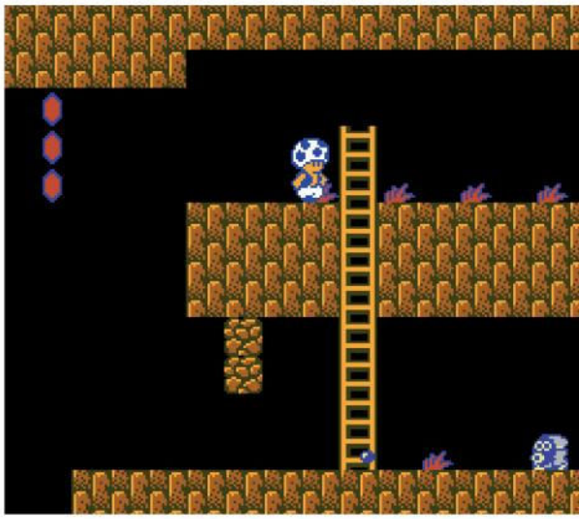
To tie everything together, *Doki*'s story was altered to explain away all the crazy Arabian leftovers – something about Mario entering a dream world called Subcon to defeat an evil frog overlord to free some enslaved fairy kids – and the game switch also explains why many of the enemies in the game never reappeared in subsequent *Mario* games, and Mario and pals' peculiar new attack method, which ditches head-stomping to see them instead pick up objects and enemies and toss them at other enemies.

Released in the US in 1988, the re-skinned *Doki Doki* version of *Super Mario Bros 2* became a hot seller for the NES, becoming the third-bestselling game on the console, trading more copies than *The Legend Of Zelda*. And owing to its success, this version was later released in Japan in 1992 under the name *Super Mario USA*.

Hollywood comes-a knockin'

Towards the end of the Eighties, *Mario*-mania was starting to take effect, and its momentum was to be fuelled even further with the release of a game that many fans still consider to be the best game in the series. Taking two years to create, *Super Mario Bros 3* introduced more staples to the *Mario* series than any sequel before or since. It introduced elements such as an overworld map, complete with patrolling enemies that whisked the player to battle screens; enjoyable diversions by way of photo-fit mini-games; multiple routes through the game's eight massive worlds; new power-ups in the form of abstract costumes for the brothers; an inventory that allowed you to carry over items obtained in one stage into another, and more secrets than you could shake a Warp Whistle at.

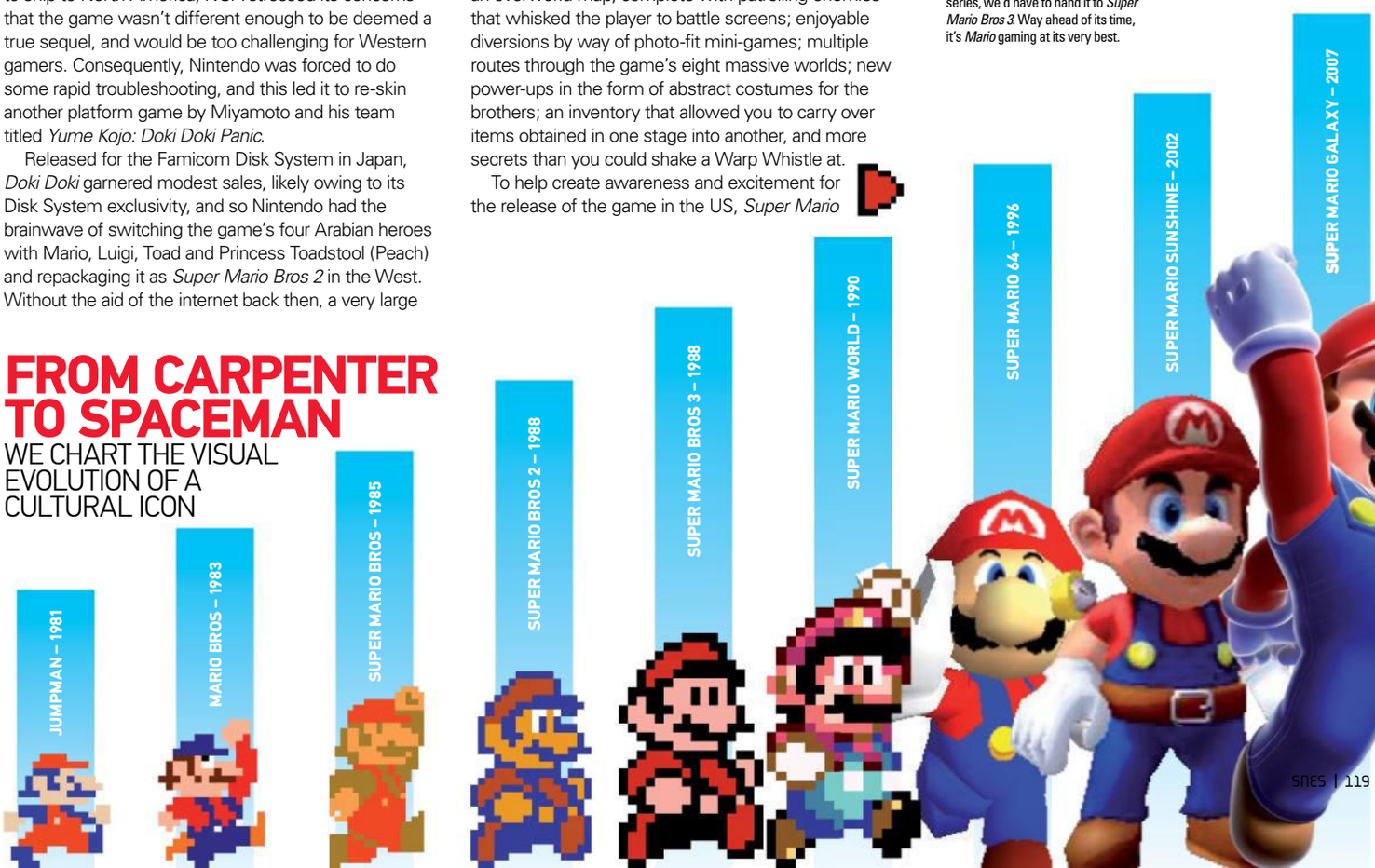
To help create awareness and excitement for the release of the game in the US, *Super Mario*



» If we had to pick the best game in the series, we'd have to hand it to *Super Mario Bros 3*. Way ahead of its time, it's *Mario* gaming at its very best.

FROM CARPENTER TO SPACEMAN

WE CHART THE VISUAL EVOLUTION OF A CULTURAL ICON


JUMPMAN – 1981
MARIO BROS – 1983
SUPER MARIO BROS – 1985
SUPER MARIO BROS 2 – 1988
SUPER MARIO BROS 3 – 1988
SUPER MARIO WORLD – 1990
SUPER MARIO 64 – 1996
SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE – 2002
SUPER MARIO GALAXY – 2007

MR. VIDEOGAME

» The colourful *Super Mario World* stuck close to the *SMB3* template.

MARIO MEMORIES

Gary Bracey Software Manager Ocean Software

I spent quite some time in the early Eighties playing in the arcades, and so my first actual introduction to Mario was *Donkey Kong*. I recall he was the first 'human' character I had seen in games, as all others were cartoon or abstract like *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man*. My next major encounter was when Ocean obtained the rights to convert the first *Mario Bros* platform game, which was an okay game. However, when I discovered *Super Mario Bros* on the NES I was completely blown away and spent many, many weeks playing it to completion... and then playing it again! It's one of the few franchises that has never suffered from compromise. Nintendo recognises this and *Zelda* to be its bar-setting titles, and also its console-shifting games. If they released a sub-par version then not only would the whole perception of the franchise suffer, but it would probably impact sales of the hardware. As for the character itself, he is as synonymous with Nintendo as Mickey Mouse is to Disney, yet a lot more contemporary. Over the years they have managed to develop his personality to keep pace with the advances in console technology, so from the original few pixels there is now a 'fleshed out' character with personality and charisma. From my own perspective, Mario is a reason alone to purchase any new Nintendo console, and I can think of no greater compliment to pay.

Trip Hawkins Founder of Electronic Arts

Naturally my first time seeing Mario was *Donkey Kong* in an arcade in Silicon Valley, perhaps 30 years ago. Miyamoto-san is the best game designer in the history of the industry, and Mario's appeal is ubiquitous.

Bros 3 was memorably first unveiled to Americans in the 1989 feature film *The Wizard*. Released into theatres a few months prior to the game's North American release, the movie's plot culminated in a Nintendo videogame tournament that ended with the finalists competing on a mysterious 'new game', which is revealed to be *Super Mario Bros 3*. Probably at the request of Nintendo, the game is hilariously unveiled in the film as if it were the single most brilliant objet d'art in the history of mankind. Although in hindsight we can let Nintendo off a little, as it actually comes pretty darn close.

But that wasn't all in the way of *Mario* marketing that year, as 1989 also spawned an animated/live action television show: *The Super Mario Bros Super Show!* The programme was an odd format that comprised a short ten-minute cartoon bookended by a peculiar live-action sitcom, in which Luigi was played by actor Danny Wells and Mario by former professional WWF wrestler Captain Lou Albano. Filmed in front of a probably perplexed studio audience, the show saw the pair conversing with drop-in celebrity guests from inside their *Bottom*-style dilapidated New York apartment, and in some episodes dress up in women's clothes to portray female versions of Mario and Luigi named Marianne and Luigeena. And if you think that sounds like a bizarre idea for a *Mario Bros* television show, during the holiday season of 1989 and 1990, Southern Californians witnessed *King Koopa's Kool Kartoons*, a live-action Krusty the Clown-type kids' telly show in which a guy dressed as Bowser presented cartoons to a room full of children, fondly referred to in the show as 'Koopa Troopas'.

1989 also marks the release of the Game Boy and saw Mario lose the pounds for his first proper portable adventure, *Super Mario Land*. A launch title for the Game Boy in Japan and North America, *Super Mario Land* was overseen by the *Donkey Kong* co-designer and *Metroid* and *Kid Icarus* producer, Gunpei Yokoi, and his solo involvement in the game resulted in a unique *Mario* title for the handheld. Putting his own stamp on the series, head-stomping Koopa Troopas now turned them into ticking time bombs, while striking some enemies in the game transformed them into a pile of decomposing bones. And elements of Yokoi's earlier work also found their way subtly into the game, such as a subterranean-style stage reminiscent of *Metroid* (Level 3-4) and the game ending with a side-scrolling shooter stage that saw Mario piloting a plane – a similar closing stage also occurred in *Kid Icarus*. Likely owing to Mario's popularity and the Game Boy's high installed base, *Super Mario Land* became a hugely successful *Mario* title, going on to sell more than 14 million units. It also spawned two sequels: *Super Mario Land 2: 6 Golden Coins*, notable for introducing Mario's doppelgänger Wario to the series, and *Wario Land: Super Mario Land 3*, in which the demented-looking villain took centre stage as a controllable character, in another first for the series.

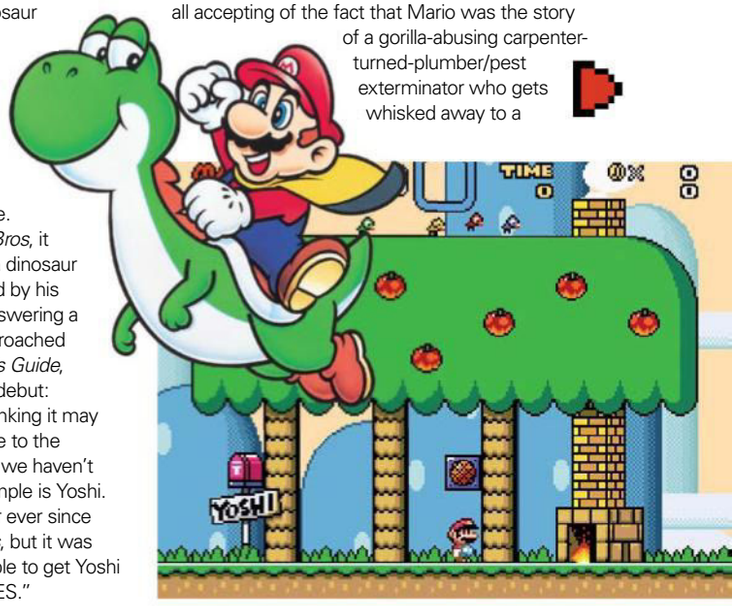
The arrival of the fourth generation of games consoles was an exciting time. Both the arcade and console markets were thriving, the NES had successfully brought gaming back home in North America, and Sega was officially first off the mark to make inroads into this new 16-bit era of gaming with the Mega Drive. With Mario now a global household name, gamers were eagerly anticipating the release of Nintendo's next instalment, especially as it was to be launched alongside its new-fangled 16-bit games console.

Released in 1990, *Super Mario World* stuck close to the *Super Mario Bros 3* template. Miyamoto and his team set about using the extra technical power of the Super Nintendo to create an enhanced, but not necessarily more innovative, version of the NES classic. Gone were the enjoyable mini-games and inventory, and Mario received a new makeover as well as an array of new power-ups, including a yellow cape that afforded him the power of temporary flight, and a lovable green dinosaur companion in the form of Yoshi – a character whose grabbing tongue was possibly inspired by Nintendo's popular Ultra Hand grabbing toy, and whose name could have derived as a portmanteau of Nintendo's then-president, Hiroshi Yamauchi. This is all pure **Retro Gamer** speculation, of course.

Following the release of *Super Mario Bros*, it was Miyamoto's intention to give Mario a dinosaur steed – an idea said to have been inspired by his motocross racing game, *Excitebike*. In answering a question about how he and his team approached *Mario* sequels in the *Mario Mania Player's Guide*, Miyamoto explained the delay in Yoshi's debut: "Once the game is released, we start thinking it may not be such a bad idea to add another title to the series. We usually have lots of ideas that we haven't been able to implement yet. A good example is Yoshi. We wanted to have Mario ride a dinosaur ever since we finished the original *Super Mario Bros*, but it was impossible technically. We were finally able to get Yoshi off the drawing boards with the Super NES."

Nintendo then followed up *Super Mario World* with *Super Mario Kart*. It became the bestselling racing game on the system, and Mario's most successful spin-off game series. Mario was now showing himself as a cultural icon, and the versatile face of Nintendo. In fact, his popularity had swelled so much that it was almost a given that the character would pique the interest of film studios wanting to cash in on his celebrity. And so Mario and Luigi did the inevitable, heading to the big screen for a live-action retelling of their videogame antics for the 1993 movie *Super Mario Bros*, plonking actors Bob Hoskins, John Leguizamo and Dennis Hopper in the roles of Mario, Luigi and Bowser, respectively. However, for all its promise and hype, the movie, which decides to throw out the colourful *Mario Bros* universe to plonk the brothers inside some kind of rubbish version of *Total Recall*, tanked at the box office and was branded an unmitigated big-budget failure, and Mario has never made a return to Tinseltown since.

Mario's next big Super Nintendo release came in the form of *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island*. In the game, Mario and Luigi were depicted as babies, with the player now fully assuming the role of a Yoshi and tasked with completing a colourful relay race to get Mario safely to his parents. Of course, given the infant ages of the brothers in the game, *SMW2* is deemed a prequel to the entire Mario series. Its story is thus pure retcon, as the game's ending shows the brothers delivered to their parents, who are seen living inside a house in the Mushroom Kingdom. That said, when you remember that before this point we were all accepting of the fact that Mario was the story of a gorilla-abusing carpenter-turned-plumber/pest exterminator who gets whisked away to a



"SMB3 was unveiled like the most brilliant objet d'art in history. It's actually close"

Yoshi took centre stage in the sequel to *Super Mario World*, *Yoshi's Island*.

Steve Lycett Sumo Digital

Boringly, I'll have to plump for *Super Mario World* as my favourite *Mario* game. I got a SNES for my 18th birthday, and lost weeks of my life hunting down all the hidden exits, completing Star Road and then rinsing it twice for the second credits sequence. An amazing game that's clearly ageing better than I am! I think his appeal simply boils down to quality. Bar the odd exception, if it's got 'Mario' in the title you know you'll be getting something that's been built with love, care and attention to detail, and will provide you with hours of fun. I'll happily buy a *Mario* title without reading a single review. Nintendo will always deliver the goods!

Ralph Baer Creator of videogames

To me, Mario is a living presence. I still have the original NES and the *Duck Hunt*/*Mario* cart that goes with it. Over the decades I have demonstrated interacting physically with the *Duck Hunt* game in the manner of today's Wii games. As has been so often the case, I was 20 years too early with those concepts. Meanwhile, who can resist playing the original *Mario* game when that old TV set is turned on in my demo area and I'm not bringing down those ducks by lobbing something physical at them?

MARIO MEMORIES

Philip and Andrew Oliver Co-Founders Blitz Software

PO: We first saw Mario appear in the *Donkey Kong* arcade game in 1981. A few years later, in 1988, we went to the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas and were stunned by the magnitude of the games industry and the size of Nintendo's presence. And at the heart of it all was Mario. At that time, *Super Mario Bros* was at its height on the NES – I think they'd sold in the region of 20 million copies, which was incredible.

AO: I remember seeing *Mario Bros* on a Japanese imported NES in about 1986. I remember it looking clean, slick and very playable. And best of all, it was instantly easily accessible. The first time I saw Mario as a character was in the arcade game *Donkey Kong*. Back then he didn't strike me as a brilliant character, but he always starred in brilliant games.

PO: All the Mario games are great. I guess we played the original a fair bit, but it was *Super Mario 64* that proved to the world that character games work better in 3D. Andrew will definitely go for *Mario Kart*, as it's his all-time favourite game! It's up there near the top with me too.

AO: Mario represents games of brilliant gameplay. He's also had a lot of work done on his 'personality', as the graphical powers of machines have been updated. Each revision has been very skilfully managed and has served to embellish and deepen Mario's qualities – they've been careful never to change his persona fundamentally, so the Mario today is essentially the same guy as the Mario of the Eighties.

Honourable Mentions

Here are some of the more unusual Mario games, which aren't part of the Super Mario canon

Mario Clash
VIRTUAL BOY

■ This red-looking 3D redux of the original *Mario Bros* coin-op was the first of two *Mario* games released for the Virtual Boy, the other being *Mario Tennis*. It's also the first ever 3D *Mario* game, if you discount *Super Mario Kart*.

Alleyway
GAME BOY

■ Although not really a *Mario* game per se, this decent *Breakout* clone saw Mario piloting the game's bat. You couldn't actually tell this from the in-game graphics, mind, but he's there on the front of the box art, sporting some natty overalls.

Mario Paint
SUPER NINTENDO

■ One of the few games to use the Super Nintendo's mouse peripheral, which came as a pack-in with the game, this artistic spin-off allowed budding artists to create drawings, stamps and animations and then set them to sounds using a music generator.

Hotel Mario
PHILLIPS CD-I

■ Often cited as being the worst *Mario* game ever. This CD-i puzzle title was a waste product from the messy Super Nintendo CD saga and tasked players with rescuing Princess Toadstool by closing a whole bunch of doors, for reasons never explained.

All Night Nippon Super Mario Bros
FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM

■ This game would be considered one of the most bizarre *Mario* clones to find release, were it not released by Nintendo. This *Super Mario Bros*/*Lost Levels* fusion featured DJs from a popular Japanese radio show.

Mario Education Games
NES, SNES, PC

■ The plumber also appeared in a series of educational games. These included the geography-themed *Mario Is Missing!*; the typing trainer, *Mario Teaches Typing*; and *Mario's Time Machine*, a thinly veiled history lesson.

Super Mario Excitebike
SUPER NINTENDO (SATELLAVIEW)

■ Mario and friends appeared in this little-known *Excitebike* title, which meshed together *Mario Kart* with motocross. Released in four parts, it was only available through the Satellaview service.

A Friendly Rivalry... Eventually

No feature on Mario would be complete without at least mentioning the epic 16-bit videogame war that Mario played a major part in. During the height of the 16-bit generation, school playgrounds around the globe were divided. One side bound together by a love for a dinosaur-riding Italian plumber named Mario; the other in support for a skittish, edgy and nippy blue hedgehog called Sonic. These two company mascots could scarcely be more different, but together their rivalry spearheaded one of the most exciting periods in gaming ever. With each console generation that passed their competition softened, until Sega eventually bailed out of the hardware market altogether in 2001. What happened next, no school kid back in 1993 could ever have predicted: Sega started releasing *Sonic* games on Nintendo consoles, starting with *Sonic Adventure 2 Battle* on Nintendo's GameCube. And then two videogame mascots got to finally settle their differences publicly when they appeared together in the game *Mario & Sonic At The Olympic Games* in 2007, followed by the long-awaited chance to beat the crap out of each other in 2008's *Super Smash Bros Brawl*.

MARIO MEMORIES

Martyn Brown Team 17 Founder

Obviously, like many people, I first saw Mario in *Donkey Kong*, but he really played second fiddle to DK. It's amazing to think that Nintendo took the Mario character and threw him into the *Super Mario* world, as it was an anonymous character before then. I wasn't super sure what to make of the first true *Mario* game in terms of character, other than it being brilliantly playable – I was too busy with the Amiga around that time anyway. I think my favourite *Mario* game has been *Super Mario 64*, the first 3D offering, because it was so incredibly well-considered for its time. I've enjoyed the past games, but they get a bit too hardcore for me. Mario's remained so enduring because he's so charming and a lot of fun. The games are generally so well-balanced to play that it's difficult to get too frustrated and therefore swear at him, although I'm sure it's been done a few times – even by me.

David Braben Co-Creator of Elite

I think my first experience of Mario was in a pub, in the original *Donkey Kong*. To be honest I didn't particularly register the character, more the way the game was played, which seemed a little bizarre at the time! *Mario 64* on the Nintendo 64 was the first Mario game I really enjoyed playing, as it was, for me at least, less annoying than the previous outings. Later games are great too, but *Mario 64* sticks in my mind the strongest, as for its time **it was a great trailblazer.** Interestingly, in the days of *Donkey Kong* and *Super Mario Bros* the character image was pretty indistinct and heavily pixelated. Later games featured him as an image, and I think that is when he started to be identified, but *Mario 64* was the first game, I think, that really made a character out of him, for example when he spoke on the title screen of the game. If anything, especially in the USA, I think he has become the icon of Nintendo. Other factors – like the fact that he seems to run like a toddler does – makes him pretty endearing. He is a pretty non-threatening character.

» Mario's back on top form following two superb Wii titles that are literally out of this world.

mushroom land through a giant pipe and must then rescue their princess from a giant turtle king, we guess such changes can be forgiven.

Released in 1996, Mario's final Super Nintendo outing saw him throw his cap into another new genre, this time the RPG with the Square-developed *Super Mario RPG: Legend Of The Seven Stars*. The game was a mixture of isometric platform RPG and turn-based battles, and the game's visuals utilised the snazzy ACM graphics techniques seen in *Donkey Kong Country*. But coming late in the Super Nintendo's life, and only released in the US and Japan, it was largely missed by many on its release.

Mario reaches 64

Another new console saw another groundbreaking entry in the *Mario* series come, this time in the form of *Super Mario 64* for the N64. Always innovating, Nintendo once again sought to revolutionise the platform genre, and in doing so proved undoubtedly that the creative, fun, engaging and abundant gameplay of previous *Mario* adventures could adapt to a true 3D polygon world unscathed. The N64's analogue controls also worked overtime to further enhance the experience. With a wealth of new acrobatic moves at Mario's disposal, *Mario 64* turned him from portly jumpy plumber into a gaming Baryshnikov. Finally, through a series of open-ended levels – all connected by a castle-shaped hub – that unfurled with each revisit, it offered players the chance to really immerse themselves in the colourful and enchanting world of the Mushroom Kingdom. It was truly the gaming equivalent of chasing the rabbit down to Wonderland, and with the inclusion of Mips the rabbit in the game, who spouted dialogue very similar to Lewis Carroll's tardy White Rabbit, this notion was clearly not lost on Miyamoto and his EAD team.

Following the release of *Mario 64*, Mario himself then broke into even more game genres with the first entry in the Hudson-developed *Mario Party* series. And the N64 era also saw Mario return to his NES sporting roots in *Mario Golf* and *Mario Tennis*, before appearing in the first *Super Smash Bros* and making his final 'so long' for the console with *Paper Mario*.

Owing to the early release of *Mario 64* on the N64, it comes as a surprise to many that a sequel was never released on the system. Well, in actual fact, for a time a *Mario 64* sequel was in development, albeit for the 64DD. In 1997 Miyamoto revealed to E3 attendees that work had started on the game. However, following the disastrous launch of the add-on in Japan, and its subsequent poor domestic sales, Nintendo promptly stopped support for the hardware and the game was scrapped.

During Nintendo's Space World event in 2000, the company showcased the power of its brand new console, the GameCube, with a *Mario* tech demo dubbed *Super Mario 128*. The short demonstration showed a large 2D Mario splintering into 128 smaller versions that ran across the surface of a globe. It showcased, for the first time, the 'sphere-walking' tech that was to be later utilised for *Super Mario Galaxy*.

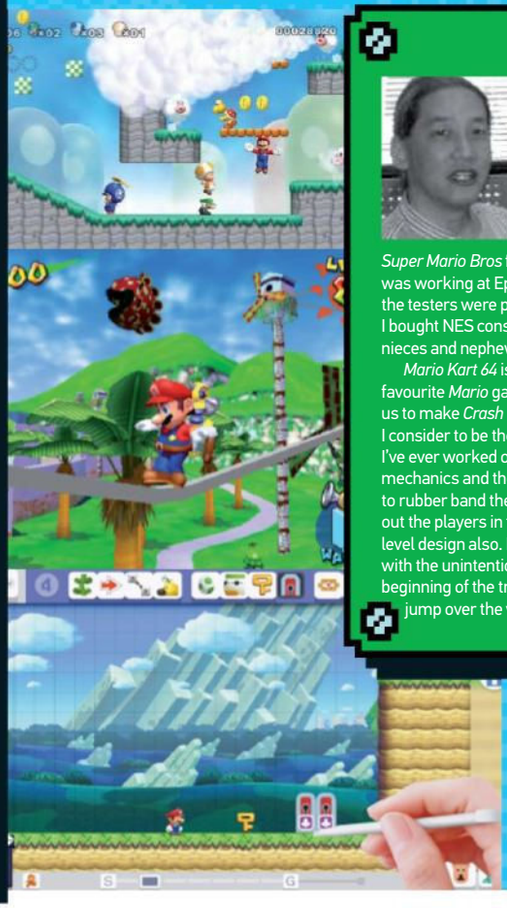
The following year, however, and at the same show, *Super Mario Sunshine* was unveiled to the crowds, and while it shared little likeness to *Super Mario 128*, it was formally announced as the official sequel to *Mario 64*. Apart from a story that saw Mario partaking in a spot of community service after the squeaky plumber is forced to clean up the mess left by a muck-spraying imposter, *Sunshine* stuck very close to *Mario 64*'s template.

Set in the sun-drenched Isle Delfino, *Sunshine* kept the popular hub structure of *Mario 64*, and progression still relied on the collection of Stars – now named Shine Sprites. As well as the 3D return of Yoshi, the most novel feature in *Sunshine* came in the form of an odd rucksack armament called FLUDD (Flash Liquidizing Ultra Dousing Device) that Mario could use not only as a cleaning weapon but also as a way to help get around the stages. Clever aiming of the FLUDD's spray nozzles

MARIO MEMORIES

Ste Pickford
Legendary 8-bit coder

Definitely *Donkey Kong* in Stockport Arcade, or maybe on holiday in Blackpool or Southport. Of course I never knew that was Mario at the time. I could never get past the second screen, but must have spent dozens of 10ps trying. The first real introduction to Mario was at Rare. We had a meeting there in about 1988, and they showed us *Super Mario Bros* on a NES. We must have just screwed our faces up because of how ugly it looked. We were heavily into developing Amiga and Atari ST games at the time, and had sort of graduated from blocky four-colour graphics to higher-res 16-colour graphics with large, non-repeating bitmaps. The Stampers told us to ignore the fact that it didn't look that good, and insisted that we play it because it was better than any Amiga game. We laughed, but I think they lent us a NES with a couple of games, and sure enough, *Super Mario Bros* was brilliant. The irony is that the simple, functional graphics of *SMB* have dated much better than the over-worked Amiga graphics of the same period. Without a doubt my favourite Mario game is *Super Mario Bros 3*. We were developing NES games ourselves when it was released, and we were just blown away by how much better this game was than anything we were working on. It was at that point that I first appreciated what a great designer Mr Miyamoto was, and what a great developer Nintendo is. They were streets ahead of everyone else in the world at that time. That game introduced so many new ideas, and had so much imagination – every new level was surprising and delightful. I don't think that level of consistent invention in one game has been matched by any game since, until *Super Mario Galaxy*, but *Super Mario Bros 3* wins for me because of the big impression it made on me when I was younger.



» *Super Mario Maker* is the latest game in the series and is an excellent level editor with skins from different *Mario* eras.

MARIO MEMORIES

Greg Omi
Atari Lynx progammer

I first saw Mario in *Donkey Kong*, but the first time I really recognised Mario was in *Super Mario Bros* for the Nintendo. I was working at Epyx at the time and the testers were playing it. That year I bought NES consoles for all of my nieces and nephews.

Mario Kart 64 is probably my favourite *Mario* game because it led us to make *Crash Team Racing*, which I consider to be the most fun game I've ever worked on. I loved the slide mechanics and the random power-ups to rubber band the gameplay, helping out the players in the back. Really good level design also. I love Wario Stadium with the unintentional short cut at the beginning of the track where you could jump over the wall twice to get a really low lap time.

Right place right time and branding. Mario came to represent Nintendo as a mascot because of the success of *Super Mario Bros*. This led Nintendo to market based on Mario, which increased his popularity. Popularity is a power function, so once you have brand recognition, you have inertia to give you a leg up on the competition. That's why everyone makes sequels, why movie companies try to make blockbuster movies, and why indies and original material have a hard time breaking through. Just look at social gaming: *FarmVille*, which I now work on, is twice as popular as the next most popular game; there are a bunch of games around second place, followed by the 'long tail' of games after that. There can only be one super popular game at a time, and at some point *FarmVille*'s popularity will fade and another game will rise to fill its spot. *World Of Warcraft* is another example of this.

could launch Mario up into the air and even afford him a handy spray-powered speed boost. However, the device quickly became a bone of contention with many fans when they soon discovered that it hindered the responsive control of Mario, and made retrieving stars almost feel like Mario-endorsed GCSE physics exercises.

With *Mario Sunshine* failing to capture or stir up the same level of popularity as previous big-budget *Mario* titles, and it becoming increasing likely that the GameCube would become Nintendo's most unsuccessful console to date, outwardly it seemed that the once-infallible videogame giant was finally losing its grip on the market it formerly dominated, and Mario seemed to echo this sense of dispassion, appearing in a series of decent but uninspired sports sequels – *Mario Power Tennis*, *Mario Superstar Baseball* and *Mario Golf Toadstool Tour* – following a good but equally uninspired *Mario Kart* sequel with *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!*. But just as it seemed Nintendo was becoming crestfallen by its fall from greatness, the Wii happened and changed its fortunes in a way that nobody could have predicted.

» *Super Mario 3D World* was released to critical acclaim and builds on mechanics first introduced in *Super Mario 3D Land*.

"This industry would be a far glummer place without Mario"

Space: the finest frontier

Both *Mario Galaxy* and *Mario Galaxy 2* stand as nigh-on flawless examples of expert game design, and rank among the best games in the *Mario* series. By making inspired use of the Wii's motion-sensor controls, Nintendo was able to recapture the keen sense of fun, exploration and enjoyment that dazzled gamers in *Mario 64*. Like *Mario 64* before it, the controls of both games were also wonderfully implemented. Players could steer Mario in comfortable *Mario 64* fashion, but also aid him using the Wii Remote, which, through an on-screen reticule, could be used to suck up 'Star Bits' and launch Mario between planets. The *Galaxy* games also saw a return of the costume-style power-ups of old, including a bee costume that gave Mario the power of temporary flight.

Complementing these two interstellar *Mario* adventures was another *Paper Mario* game, *Mario Kart Wii*, and *Mario Kart 8* (for Wii U) and a real return to the character's Famicom roots in the four-player platformer *New Super Mario Bros*. To celebrate Mario's 'super' 25th anniversary, Nintendo released its *Super Mario Special Collection* for the Wii, a special edition version of *Super Mario All-Stars*.

Since then we've had the utterly sublime *Super Mario 3D Land* on Nintendo 3DS, the less impressive, but still enjoyable, *New Super Mario Bros 2* and an enjoyable Wii U entry in the shape of *New Super Mario Bros U*. Interestingly Mario's side-on antics aren't feeling as fresh as they once did and it's clear that most of the imagination is now being placed in his 3D adventures. This is most obvious with the excellent *Super Mario 3D World*, which features an emphasis on multiplayer play, crazy looking environments and cute looking cat suits that allow you to greatly explore the brilliantly designed levels. The most recent addition to the series is *Super Mario Maker*, which made its debut on Wii U in 2015 and is shortly due to appear on 3DS. It's a clever creation kit that features different generations of graphics from past *Mario* games in a simple, but comprehensive editing package.

Aside from a new *Paper Mario* game on Wii U, it's relatively quiet on the *Mario* front as Nintendo is fully focused on its new NX. We're positive however, that when a new *Mario* game does arrive, it will capture the glory days of his early NES and SNES adventures.

STREET FIGHTER II TURBO

RETURN OF THE KING

- **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SNES

HISTORY

I don't exactly have a lot of love for Capcom's seminal brawler. Don't get me wrong. I'm fully aware of its historical importance and realise that plenty of people still play it on a regular basis but after witnessing the glorious choreography of *Street Fighter 3: Third Strike,* its older peer really appeared to have nothing new to offer. How wrong I was…

Thanks to Capcom, and more importantly, Xbox Live arcade, I've been able to re-discover the joy of *Street Fighter II,* or more specifically, *Street Fighter II' Hyper Fighting* (or *Turbo* as it's known to us Brits). While the original *Street Fighter II* remains a slow, turgid experience (sorry guys, but it's true) *Turbo* gives the game a much-needed boost of speed and ensures that bouts are always satisfying to play. New costumes, extra moves and re-designed backdrops were just a few of the additions that Capcom included and I still have the cool metal tin that it was lovingly packaged in.

While later titles have presented us with more character choices than ever, ridiculous specials and the beauty that is parrying, there's still something immensely satisfying about a no-nonsense round of *Turbo.* There's no need to worry about pulling off double fireball motions, you won't moan over the cheapness of *Third Strike's* Chun-Li and Ken, you can just concentrate on mastering the good old fashioned art of beating the hell out of each other. Sure the character models look a little old-fashioned now and the animation has lost a lot of its slickness over the years, but even with these niggles (and that's all they really are) *Turbo's* gameplay remains resoundingly solid.

While it's no longer my 2D fighter of choice (that honour goes to the excellent digital port of *Street Fighter III: Third Strike,* I still enjoy the odd bout of fisticuffs on Capcom's excellent brawler whenever I have my SNES out (which is often). It remains one of the slickest 16-bit arcade conversions around, and time has done nothing to diminish that fact.

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Axelay

Instant Expert

The Japanese and North American versions of *Axelay* were launched within a month of each other. European gamers had to wait an agonising 12 months to get their hands on the game

Although Taro Kudou was responsible for the game's excellent soundtrack, Masanori Adachi remixed Level 2's tune, with memorable results

***Axelay*'s soundtrack was** released on CD in Japan on 21 October 1992

The Axelay fighter was featured in the 2004 PS2 release *Airforce Delta Strike*, which was retitled *Deadly Skies III* in Europe

***Axelay* features references** to other Konami titles, the most obvious being the flame dragons on Level 5 – a cheeky nod to similar enemies in *Gradius II*

A beta version of the game was made available, which allowed players to quickly select which level they wished to tackle as well as gain invincibility. This version was used to bug test portions of the game prior to release

***Axelay*'s main programmer** Hideo Ueda has also worked on the *Castlevania*, *Silent Hill* and *Metal Gear Solid* franchises

To get the 'true' ending you need to complete the game on the hard difficulty setting. Completing it on normal results in the mocking message 'Challenge Hard Mode'

We hop onto our custom-made cardboard star fighter and charts a course for the Illis System in order to bring you as much information on Konami's seminal SNES shooter as possible. You better have an itchy trigger finger...

Konami's *Axelay* is a landmark shooter in many ways, but the most striking is the fact that it manages to bring intense alien-blasting action to a format that supposedly struggles with the genre. Much has been made over the years of Nintendo's decision to grant the SNES a CPU operating at a mere 3.58MHz – its rival, the Sega Mega Drive, contained a Motorola 68000 processor, which tore along at a comparatively blistering 7.67MHz – and many critics still maintain that this is the reason for the puzzling lack of decent shmups on the system: the sluggish central processor simply cannot cope with multiple enemies and projectiles on the screen all at the same time, they suggest. There's probably a grain of truth in this assumption, but the theory does come somewhat unstuck when you take a look at *Axelay* in glorious motion.

Released back when SNES titles were still leveraging their graphical superiority over Mega Drive software, *Axelay*'s primary draw was its incredible visuals. Few who were around at the time to witness it in motion can forget the powerful spectacle of the unique rolling perspective, which used the SNES's custom graphics chips to create the impression of flying towards a distant horizon. In truth, it wasn't totally convincing, but it was certainly striking and remains so even today.

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery

Like *Thunder Force II* and Konami stablemate *Salamander*, *Axelay* alternates between horizontal and side-scrolling levels. This essentially gives shooter addicts the best of both worlds, and both variations offer the same degree of amazing and addictive gameplay. Another constant is the flawless standard of presentation; Mode 7 trickery aside, *Axelay* is a jaw-droppingly gorgeous game and arguably one of the best-looking 16-bit shooters ever created. Not only is the screen awash with highly detailed enemy ships, but the bosses are some of the most memorable ever committed to silicon.

Refreshingly, *Axelay* has top-notch gameplay to back up the appealing aesthetics. Unlike the vast majority of other genre classics, *Axelay* features no weapon or item pick-ups whatsoever. As you advance through the game you gain access to more armaments, which can be loaded onto your craft between missions, but essentially you're given all of the tools you need from the outset of the game. Every situation you encounter during the adventure can be dealt with by switching to one of your three available weapon pods – although naturally some are better at the job than others.

Another unique feature is the way in which your *Axelay* craft

Pixel Perfect

Your guide to the characters of Axelay. How many have you seen?

» A-12 Interceptor

» Aquatic Attacker

» Armada Battleship

» Baby Robo Spider

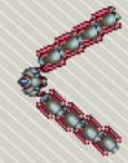
» BombShip

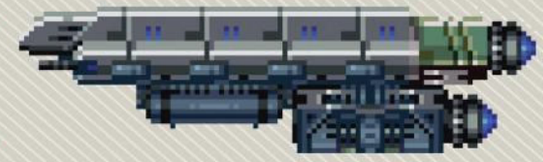
» Colony Defense Droid

» Cyclops

» Depth Charger

» Crawler


» Cutter Blade


» Crawler Carrier

» Drone

» DropShip

» Evil Seahorse

» F19 Fighter Escort

» Fake Axelay

» Fire Floater

» Fire Walker

» Fire Worm

» Supreme Gunship

» S-67 Glider

» G70 Firesailer

» GT56 Attack Craft

» Guard Walker

» Gun Turret

» Jellyfish

» Laser Gunship

» Mine

» Mini Fighter

» Missile Launcher

» Mobile Armour

» R43 Firestorm

» P-90 Fighter

» Pod Turret

» SpiderWalker

» Flying Fish

» Skater

» SpaceBird

» Needler

» Spike Craft

» SpyDroid

» Storm Ship

» Sucker Pod

» Flame Dragon

» Tentacle Tracker

» Tube Spider

» Underwater Turret

» Water Grub

» X-77 Jumper

» X-155 StormBringer

Critical Reception

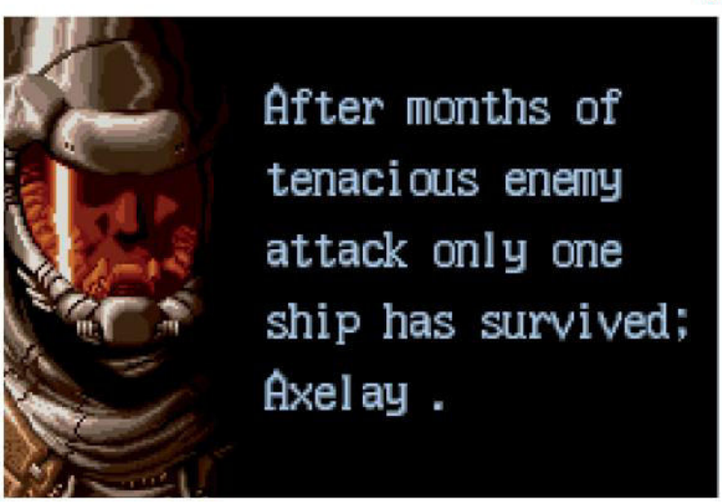
What the gaming press thought...

"It's got the best graphics of any game, on any system. Ever. After seeing it, your friends will be so gobsmacked they'll rush out and buy SNESs of their own"

- **SUPER PLAY** 1992

takes damage. Sustaining a direct hit from a projectile doesn't kill you but instead knocks out whatever weapon you have equipped at the time. This means you can take three hits before you lose a life. However, this is balanced by the fact that a direct collision with another craft or part of the environment results in your fighter instantly being ripped asunder in a shower of metal.

When it was launched in 1992, *Axelay* gained incredible praise from all quarters, with the gaming press understandably bowled over by the unique faux-3D scrolling and high standard of presentation. Taro Kudou's perfectly suited soundtrack was also held in high regard and is outstanding, even by today's standards. Given the popularity of the game and its near-dominance of the SNES shooter library, a sequel was almost a given – in fact, the game's ending sequence practically promises a follow-up with the words: 'See you again at *Axelay 2*.' Sadly, despite the rumours and anticipation of fans, Konami never fulfilled that particular pledge. Main programmer Hideo Ueda – who also worked on *TwinBee*, *Quarth* and *Parodius* – remained with the company but Kazuhiko Ishida – who is credited as 'support programmer' on the title – went on to establish Treasure with Masato Maegawa in the same year that *Axelay* was released. It has been a common rumour over the years that other key staffers involved with the game also left Konami with Maegawa and Ishida at the same time, which possibly explains why a planned sequel never materialised.



» Poor logistics on the part of the Illis System's defence forces, but the setup made for a great shooter.

Best of the best

Today *Axelay*'s standing in the shooter world is as high as ever, with the game regularly appearing in polls to ascertain the greatest shmup of all time. It continues to command a fair price on the second-hand market, but thankfully for those of you that don't relish the thought of paying over the odds for a dusty old cartridge, *Axelay* has also been made available via Nintendo's Wii-based Virtual Console service, where its lofty reputation has resulted in it being discovered and appreciated by a whole new legion of new fans.

Axelay's Arsenal

Here's a rundown of the weapon systems available on your top-of-the-line D117B Axelay fighter

»Straight Laser
A powerful burst of plasma energy, which is one of your first weapons

»Needle Cracker
A swift-firing homing weapon, which seeks out enemy units

»Wind Laser
The final laser upgrade has a wide range of fire

»Round Vulcan
360 degrees of high-velocity death: a vital weapon

»Morning Star
Another weapon handy for taking out several enemies at once

»Macro Missile
A powerful rocket with a large blast radius

»Explosion Bomb
Air-to-ground missiles useful for taking out gun turrets

»Cluster Bomb
Quite similar to the Explosion Bomb, but fires backwards

Twin Galaxies High Score

SNES [NTSC]
- **NAME:** PATRICK J DiCESARE
- **POINTS:** 1,974,980

Memorable Moments

Sit back and enjoy Konami's coders let loose on 16-bit hardware

A matter of perspective

Granted, *Axelay*'s Mode 7 scrolling landscape isn't all that realistic and looks a little outdated, but in 1992 it was astonishing. 2D shooters had always been relatively flat affairs, and Konami's graphical trick was impressive.

Afraid of spiders

Arachnatron may not be the toughest boss you'll face, but he's one of the most unforgettable. Almost filling the screen, this beastie shows some stunning animation and was a class above the static guardians in most shooters of the era.

Going sideways

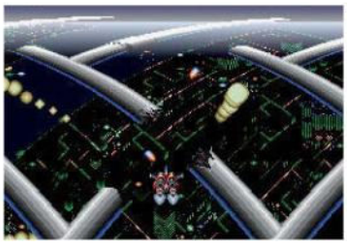
Mixing horizontal and vertical scrolling in shooters wasn't new in 1992 – in fact, Konami had done it before – but that doesn't detract from the shock of entering Level 2 and realising that you're scrolling in a different direction.

Twenty seconds to comply

In 1992 *RoboCop* was still a household name, and *Axelay*'s second boss is shamelessly based on the scary rogue security bot ED-209. The eerily robotic music further accentuated the rather oppressive nature of this boss battle.

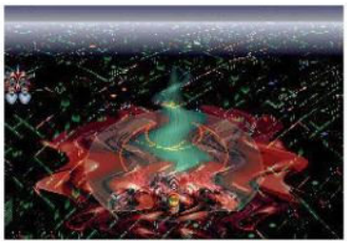
Rings around the world

Level 2 starts off as a typical space station environment, but halfway through you realise that you're in a 'ring world' – a concept made famous in Japanese anime series *Gundam* and the more recent *Halo* titles.



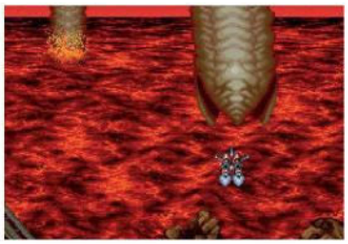
Barrier to entry

Level 3 takes place above the neon lights of a brightly coloured city, but you'll be focused on navigating the vast network of barriers that block your path – taking out the weak segments causes them to plummet towards the ground.



Don't go changing

The third boss that you face starts off looking anything but fearsome, but after taking a beating he morphs into a massive battle station thanks to the incredible graphical power of Nintendo's 16-bit hardware.



I got worms

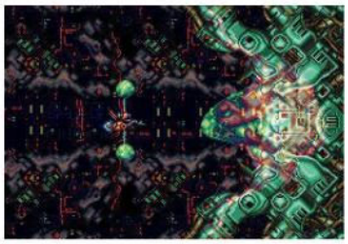
Someone at Konami was clearly a Frank Herbert fan, because Level 5 features some massive worms that bear more than a passing resemblance to those witnessed in the author's legendary sci-fi epic *Dune*.

Skimming the surface

Every decent shooter needs an underwater segment, and *Axelay* has one in Level 4. Placing your ship above the surface of the water causes water to splash up; just one of many awesome graphical effects in the game.

You and whose army?

The final stage throws you in at the deep end, fighting against a bunch of ships so large that they don't even fit on the screen. In terms of pure spectacle it's one of the game's most impressive moments.



Copycat

The final boss is a sneaky fellow and even goes as far as to replicate your ship and use clones against you. Seeing his scanning field appear and methodically copy your craft is a terrifying – but nonetheless impressive – event.

After blowing away the evil enemy leader you're left to reflect on your incredible accomplishment. The effort was worth it, as you've single-handedly saved an entire star system from the unspeakable horrors of alien oppression. In other words, you're something of a diamond geezer.

Boss Rush

Many shmup aficionados would argue that a blaster lives and dies by the quality of its boss encounters, and *Axelay* certainly doesn't disappoint in this department. As well as a truly fearsome number of mid-level bosses, the game boasts some of the most unforgettable level guardians to grace the 16-bit era. These epic enemies are notable not only for their variety and cunning tactics, but for allowing the SNES to showcase some of its most impressive visual tricks, with sprite rotation, Mode 7 scaling and smooth animation. Here's a rundown of the supreme beings waiting for you at the conclusions of *Axelay*'s levels.

Arachnatron

Stage One - Cumuluses

Throughout the history of shooters there has been a custom of memorable opening bosses, and the mechanical spider that waits at the conclusion of *Axelay*'s first level certainly conforms to that tradition. Boasting spookily authentic animation thanks to its multi-jointed nature – each limb is a separate sprite – and a fearsome phalanx of baby spider robots supporting from the rear, it's no wonder that Arachnatron has remained indelibly inked in the memory of many a SNES gamer. Naturally, its status as the game's debut boss encounter results in a relatively low degree of difficulty: the tractor-beam web that Archanatron occasionally spits out slows your ship down, making it harder to dodge incoming projectiles, but on the whole you'll find this chap looks a lot more scary than he actually is. Focus all of your firepower on the mouth section initially because, once you destroy it, the web can no longer be fired. After this you should throw all of your available weaponry at the eye, which is the spider's weak spot.

T-36 Towbar

Stage Two - Tralieb Colony

Bearing an uncanny resemblance to bipedal *RoboCop* antagonist ED-209, the T-36 Towbar lurks in a battered and derelict portion at the end of the Tralieb Colony. Animated using a combination of sprites and smoothly rotating Mode 7 effects, this two-legged monster slowly stumbles backwards along the corridor, stopping every so often to attempt to blow your fragile craft out of the air. When Towbar pauses to attack, make sure you're high up near the ceiling of the level. He will either shoot with his machine gun, which can be blasted off if you feel like adjusting the odds in your favour, or engage his deadly laser beam attack. Both attacks can be angled, so you'll need to make sure you're in the top-right corner of the screen to avoid being vaporised. Towbar's weak spot is the exposed motor unit just behind his protective hood; the explosive nature of your missiles or bombs can penetrate his defensives for massive damage. This resourceful enemy is also capable of hurling smaller projectiles your way, so don't let your guard down.

Regenertoid

Stage Three - Urbanite

This end-of-level boss starts off in a rather underwhelming fashion, teleporting onto the screen as a tiny ship before changing into the shape of a spinning top. What it lacks in visual impact it makes up for in raw aggression, though – you'll need to take out the various gun ports on the rim of Regenertoid to put a stop to the hail of bullets that it spews out. Doing this also triggers the second stage of the attack: the rather pathetic cone-like shape is augmented by fearsome red battle armour, complete with devastating laser cannons that fill up large portions of the screen when fired – just make sure you're not anywhere near them at the time. Focus your attack on the centre of Regenertoid's shell and you'll send it packing in next to no time, but make sure you keep moving because this monster's massive size means that on-screen real estate is kept to a bare minimum, making it hard to manoeuvre.

Aquadon

Stage Four - The Cavern

Looking every inch like the kind of crustacean you'd run a mile from if you ever encountered it on a beach, Aquadon ramps up the difficulty level with his multiple attack capabilities. If you don't get taken out by the needle laser blasts and procession of unfriendly minions that swarm around his thick shell, you'll still have to face the prospect of being zapped by his irksome lightning bolt attack. While this isn't deadly in itself, it stuns your craft temporarily and causes your weapons system to go haywire, which often means you'll end up with an attack that is woefully mismatched for the situation, forcing you to quickly re-select the correct armament. Aquadon has two weak spots, both of which must be pushed backwards into his shell before the other opens up. You'll need to pay close attention to which weak spot is exposed at any one time, as you'll more often than not be looking elsewhere on the screen to avoid the many hostile objects flying in your general direction.

Wayler

Stage Five - Lava Planet

Transported from the soggy depths of the Cavern to the fiery wastes of the imaginatively named Lava Planet, your waterlogged space suit is likely to dry out quickly, but unfortunately you'll also have to face off against one of the game's most famous faces and the cover star of the Western version: Wayler. A massive cyborg capable of withstanding extreme temperatures and clad in molten lava, this brute is yet another example of the SNES's graphical muscle, showcasing smooth, multi-segmented animation and filling almost the entire screen. Like any other self-respecting fire robot, Wayler is fond of spewing flames from his mouth and flailing his enormous arms around like a child at a school disco, causing untold amounts of damage to any spaceship foolish enough to be in close proximity. Be sure to keep well away from those massive mitts of his and channel all of your energy into blasting away at his chest. Doing so reveals his weak spot – a green 'heart' – that, once destroyed, forces Wayler's lifeless body to sink beneath the red-hot planet surface, never to return.

Veinion

Stage Six - The Armada of Annihilation's Fortress

After fighting your way through the hostile alien fleet and infiltrating the enemy base, you're faced with the final challenge: Veinion, the evil leader of the Armada of Annihilation. At first glance he appears to be some kind of robotic overlord, but after ceaselessly blasting away for a while you'll uncover his true form: a horrific alien organism, which has the capability of copying your attacks. Your ship is scanned and Veinion proceeds to hurl clone Axelay craft in your direction. Needless to say, this is the hardest boss battle in the entire game and seems to last for an age. Even when you've finally destroyed Veinion and made good your escape from the rapidly disintegrating alien fortress, the battle is far from over – the enemy leader tries to prevent your getaway by filling the screen with shrapnel and blocking your progress. Land a few well-aimed missiles in his gullet and he vanishes into the ether, leaving the path open for you to return home to a rapturous reception and more canapés and fizzy drink than you can reasonably consume.

CLASSIC MOMENTS

Wild Guns

» **PLATFORM:** SNES » **DEVELOPER:** NATSUME » **RELEASED:** 1994

Talk about not easing you in gently! The boss that awaits you at the end of *Wild Guns*' first stage is a ridiculous monstrosity that looks like it's been loaned out by Cyberdyne Systems. Dwarfing your puny-looking player, it alternates its attacks between tearing up the screen with an array of guided rockets and cutting a swathe of destruction with its immense Gatling gun. You frantically dash around, firing off round after round of hot lead with little impact on the metallic monstrosity's health. And then it hits you. Shoot for the core – all right, its head. With newfound purpose you direct your shots in a deadly hail of gunfire. The feeling of seeing it literally fall apart as you finally defeat it makes all the previous pain worthwhile.

BIO

Wild Guns was the brainchild of Shunichi Taniguchi. It's effectively Natsume's take on *Cabal* and *Blood Brothers*, but the Japanese developer mixes things up by having its Wild West theme infiltrated by a bizarre assortment of killer robots. Despite its excellent and engaging gameplay, *Wild Guns* is now quite rare, often fetching silly money on popular auction sites. Luckily, an enhanced update with four-player support and new stages is heading to the PS4.

MORE CLASSIC WILD GUNS MOMENTS

The lone gunmen

Wild Guns comes into its own when playing with a friend. The sheer number of enemies means you'll need a decent system for crowd control or it'll all end in tears. Our top tactic is to divide the screen in half, with each player focusing on their own side to minimise casualties. Just don't cross the streams or you may well find yourself playing on your own next time.

Boom, boom, shake, shake the room

The assault in *Wild Guns* is relentless. When not being attacked by cowboys riding on flying saucers, you're dodging giant robots that split open to fire missiles. Sometimes you just need to take a breather. *Wild Guns* may not be the first arcade-style game to feature a screen-clearing smart bomb, but we're pretty sure it's one of the most spectacular to gawp at.

Destruction corner

Pretty much everything on the screen can be interacted with in some fashion. Shoot a barrel and it explodes, bullet holes get left in crates, while chairs and tables become useless bits of wood. This OTT destruction is most noticeable in the saloon, where you can reduce bottles to smithereens and even obliterate a jukebox. We certainly wouldn't want to be left with that bill…

Comedy corner

Although it focuses on carnage, *Wild Guns* is also filled with fun little touches that can't help but raise a smile. One of our favourites is the comedy thwack you give to enemies that get too close, but if we had to pick one it would be the bush cowboys. These silly blighters comically appear in walking bushes, ready to take pot shots at you when they think you aren't looking.

SUPER METROID

The Metroid series went in exciting new directions with the release of this 16-bit classic. We visited Nintendo HQ to scale the summit of the Metroid series with director Yoshio Sakamoto

» Sakamoto also directed *Metroid Fusion* and *Zero Mission*.

Heading back up to ground level as I leave the immaculate subway at Jujo Station in the south of Kyoto, I walk through this remarkably unremarkable suburb until I see the big white block that houses Nintendo's contemporary headquarters. The gates to NCL are manned by two portly, middle-aged guards who seem to project a faintly threatening presence, which is comically undone as I notice, behind them, in the back of their little booth, a stash of NCL-manufactured toy guns apparently left over from the Seventies and a selection of Nintendo character plushes from the Famicom era. This may not be the original Nintendo HQ site, but it clearly retains the company's history like a hoarding retro gamer hangs on to loose carts.

Inside, beyond the pristine lawns and shiny entrance, I enter a marble-floored, austere world whose foyer is staffed by painfully polite and correctly spoken Nintendo officials. Eventually I'm led into a meeting room on the ground floor, where I sip the o-cha kindly provided by the demure NCL woman as I wait – and slightly nervously revise my notes and cue my Dictaphone – until a smiling, ponytailed artist type arrives and immediately makes his introduction. This is Yoshio Sakamoto, producer of *Super Metroid* back in the early Nineties and still an integral Nintendo developer today. "Hajimemashite. Yoroshiku onegai shimasu."

Sakamoto has brought with him a small booklet containing an overview of *Super Metroid* to aid his memory – the game was completed 15 years ago, but the *Metroid* legacy stretches back two decades – as we chat.

"To start with, there was the Famicom *Metroid* game," he recalls. Sakamoto worked on that first *Metroid* adventure, and its relevance to *Super Metroid* is particularly important because of the unchanging core concept of the 2D *Metroid* games; a core that was formed in said Famicom Disk System original of 1986.

"My boss [producer Makoto Kanoh] told me that *Metroid* was really popular in North America, so he encouraged me to produce a new *Metroid* game with the high-quality graphics that were becoming possible thanks to the Super Famicom. Of course I said, 'Yes, I'd like to try doing that.' The game design and concept had already been established before *Metroid II* was produced for the Game Boy," Sakamoto explains. "When it came to making another sequel, this time for the Super Famicom, we really wanted to see how far we could push the SFC to generate greater power of expression and enhance the appearance of the game world, all while working with a basically unchanged concept. That was our initial motivation as far as *Super Metroid* was concerned: to build on the expressiveness of *Metroid II* and achieve greater presence, something closer to a reality."

Sakamoto had nothing to do with the development of *Metroid II* – at the time his services were required elsewhere within NCL – yet that sophomore title in part shaped the plan for *Super Metroid*: "As the last scene depicted Baby Metroid being born right in front of Samus's eyes… well… there's no real explanation for that in the course of the games, but that scene was another source of incentive for us in that we wanted to follow on from that ending, linking *Metroid II* with *Super Metroid*. We were determined to keep the same world-view and maintain the continuity of the story."

Aside from the basic formula of play that was set in motion by *Metroid*,

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO

» **DEVELOPER:** R&D1/INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS

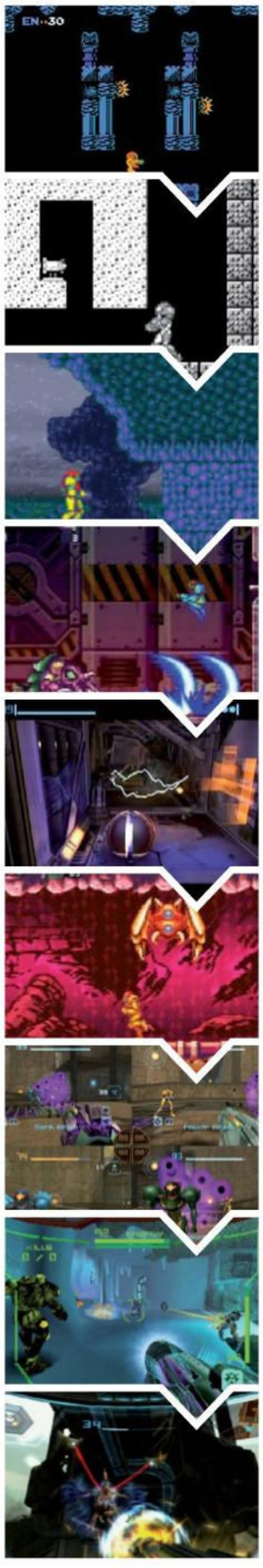
» **RELEASED:** 1994

» **GENRE:** ADVENTURE

» Zebes was an atmospheric setting, with a variety of environments given life by the new SNES hardware.

» The iconic Morph Ball has its roots in the lo-fi NES's inability to convincingly animate a crawling Samus.

Series highlights



Metroid
(FDS/NES/GBA – 1986)

The *Metroid* series was born on disk, not cartridge. It began life as this 1986-vintage Famicom Disk System title before migrating to the silicon of NES carts for consumption in the West. Videogames' first internationally famous heroine was born here. (An emulated version can be found in the GameCube release of *Metroid Prime*.)

Metroid II: Return Of Samus
(Game Boy – 1992)

This monochrome curio transported Samus to the Metroid homeworld of SR388, its dramatic finale providing Sakamoto and team with a bridge into the events of *Super Metroid*. It may not be as pretty as its relatives, but *Return Of Samus* remains an essential experience for the family's admirers.

Super Metroid
(SNES – 1994)

Arguably the finest game in the *Metroid* series, this 16-bit creation brought 2D adventure gaming to a new level of sophistication. *Super Metroid*'s pacing and world design are by all measures perfect, and there are so many aspects to explore here that the game retains its unique allure 15 years on.

Metroid Fusion
(GBA – 2002)

Taking the *Super Metroid* template into the 21st Century, and again with Yoshio Sakamoto at the creative helm, *Metroid Fusion* found Samus once more facing the destruction of a game world. Only this time Samus was the knowing perpetrator.

Metroid Prime
(GameCube – 2002)

Retro Studios' first-person adventure spin on the *Metroid* template sold 1.5 million copies in the United States alone, yet it simultaneously pushed Samus Aran away from Japanese sensibilities, guaranteeing a future of Western success at the cost of *Metroid*'s Japanese heritage. *Prime*'s unusual perspective and restrained style of first-person play carved out a niche for Samus in the next generation, cleverly sidestepping the FPS genre to find new ground.

Metroid: Zero Mission
(GBA – 2004)

Zero Mission's retelling of the first *Metroid* game brought with it a *Fusion*-standard graphical upgrade. By this stage Samus's popularity in her homeland was at an all-time low, and sales didn't reach six figures in Japan; a shame, as *Zero Mission* was even better than the FDS original.

Metroid Prime 2: Echoes
(GameCube – 2004)

The first *Metroid* game to feature a multiplayer mode, although its inclusion was perhaps ill-advised, as it failed to really add anything of worth to the traditional single-player adventure. *Echoes*' greatest successes were in translating more of Samus's abilities to a 3D context.

Metroid Prime: Hunters
(DS – 2006)

Developed by NST, the outfit behind titles such as *Ridge Racer 64* and *Wave Race: Blue Storm*, *Hunters* was one of the better first-person DS games, with a multiplayer mode that felt more natural than that of *Echoes*. However, compared with joypad-controlled *Metroid* predecessors, *Hunters*' touch-screen controls resulted in a slightly lower-than-average level of overall satisfaction.

Metroid Prime 3: Corruption
(Wii – 2007)

The final release in the *Prime* trilogy effectively brought the modern *Metroid* experience closer in line with the FPS genre, combining Remote-directed shooting and relentless action.

» *Super Metroid* brought with it *Metroid II*'s battery saves, a godsend after the first game's password system.

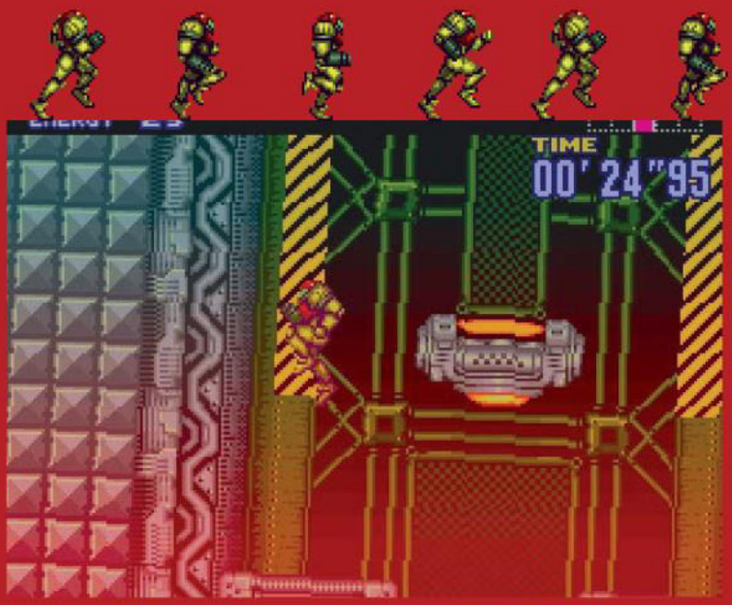
the code on that million-selling disk also plotted the aesthetic direction of the series. I suggest to Sakamoto-san that *Super Metroid* and the *Metroid* games in general don't look like 'typical' NCL games and I ask him why that might be. He sips his tea and then replies: "I think the film *Alien* had a huge influence on the production of the first *Metroid* game. All of the team members were affected by HR Giger's design work, and I think they were aware that such designs would be a good match for the *Metroid* world we had already put in place. To be honest, I've never really been clear on what is or isn't the 'Nintendo look', but as far as we were concerned, we were just projecting another image from within Nintendo – another face of Nintendo, if you like. But yes, it's a science-fiction game, so…"

Other than the artistic influence of Necronom, Sakamoto reckons that numerous games affected the style of *Super Metroid* – "I can't list them… There are just too many of them" – although he counters this by highlighting the experimental side of his team's early work: "For the prototype stage of *Super Metroid*'s development we just had a few Intelligent Systems programming staff, myself, and another [in-house] Nintendo designer. We examined what was possible in the game, and as the core *Metroid* system was already in place we considered how we could make the game easier to play, what new ideas we could incorporate, and so on… Then we drafted in lots of other NCL and IntSys developers once we got beyond that stage and into the proper work."

There has always been a complex yet mutually beneficial relationship between Nintendo, then based in Higashiyama (to the northeast of the current Minami location), and Intelligent Systems, constantly situated in the eastern Kyoto ward of Higashiyama. Sakamoto refers to the team as "IntSys" and says that it had been helping Nintendo with the *Metroid* series since the initial FDS game, "as a second-party developer". While it's fair to say that the game design and play-testing abilities of NCL's in-house staff have always been some of the world's best, Intelligent Systems' developers were on hand to provide indispensable technical know-how, particularly focused on the hardware side of things.

"IntSys has always been very capable with hardware," Sakamoto adds, "so during the experimental stage we told the IntSys programmers what kinds of things we wanted to do and verified what in reality could be done. We'd been well prepared for the move to the Super Famicom hardware, so we had some idea of what to expect before we went into it; which features we should use, and how. I think it was good that we went through the prototype stage because it gave us a base onto which the post-

"The nap room wasn't being cleaned at all. One morning staff woke us up and told us that the room smelled like a zoo"



» The open-ended gameplay meant that *Super Metroid* has become popular for speed runs.

» *Super Metroid* used the full range of special effects available to the SNES for its bosses and environments.

experimental stage staffers could easily begin their work. At the time, the SFC was reputed to be difficult to develop for. Depending on how you partitioned the Super Famicom's video RAM, which looked after the sorting of image information, the scope of possibilities would change wildly. Knowing that you could diminish the VRAM's potential by poor partitioning was useful information, because it meant we could think about how certain things could or couldn't be achieved, and how we could work around those limitations. As we were migrating from the Famicom to Super Famicom, really everyone – not just Nintendo but other developers too – seemed to be having fun testing the feature set of the new hardware. That went for us, too: I remember often thinking, 'Oh, I had no idea we could even do this!' The graphics and sound were fantastic, but we were still driven by wanting to [not] be outdone by the arcade games of the time."

To a man, the developers supplied by IntSys to work on *Super Metroid* were all programmers. In spite of the various backgrounds of the *Super Metroid* team, there was apparently no NCL-IntSys rivalry; no factions, just harmony and productive co-operation. Key team members from the Nintendo side included Makoto Kanoh, the producer, the guy who instigated the project; my interviewee, Yoshio Sakamoto, who was the director in charge of game design; and Tomomi Yamane, who was the figure Sakamoto regards as having been the 'main' designer: "He was very skilled and was particularly interested in the hardware stuff, consulting with the IntSys people as to what kind of images could be displayed."

Even though the team's objective was to build on the success of *Metroid* and *Metroid II*, only three of the original *Metroid* team, including Sakamoto himself, worked on *Super Metroid*: "The rest of the [NCL side] was made up of young trainee developers," he recalls. "Of course young people can be quite impertinent – and those on the *Super Metroid* team certainly were – but I think that's quite important in a way. These young people had enough about them to help us a lot. There were many different personalities in the *Super Metroid* team, which was a good thing. It was a harsh development environment, so I'm sure that some of the staff didn't enjoy the work, but generally the team was full of the 'Let's go for it!' spirit. I think that was partly because of the timing as well, what with the Super Famicom pushing everything to the next level."

The "next level" wasn't merely the notion of advanced graphics and sound: it was also a matter of the expansion and improvement of level design. However, Sakamoto and team were reluctant to drag *Super Metroid* into the realm of storytelling methods utilised by RPGs and other adventure games. "We really didn't want to explain things to the player using too many words," Sakamoto states. "We just wanted to let them play and be able to work things out for themselves. For example, say there's a mechanism where you need to climb up a ladder and place a bomb there in order to advance, as one component in the solution of a [gameplay] riddle; if that was all you needed to do in order to get through to the next area, you'd miss all of the other mechanisms we'd put in place and wouldn't even realise that certain parts of the game existed. We wanted players to explore everything we'd made and then move on. That's why we designed the maps in such a way that the player couldn't escape without exploration, or in such a way that the player would end up back at a starting point before advancing. The player would be cornered/driven and would eventually be forced to stop and say, 'Right, how should I think about this area?' That's the essential point of *Super Metroid*'s map design. Not using words meant

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

DONKEY KONG JR
SYSTEM: ARCADE, FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM/NES, ETC
YEAR: 1982

KID ICARUS (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: FDS/NES, GBA
YEAR: 1986

METROID
SYSTEM: FDS/NES, GBA
YEAR: 1986

that the player had to 'feel' his/her way through the game – and that's how we wanted it to be. When they discovered something new – a new item or new location – we wanted the player to feel that he/she had made that discovery independently, without help from the game."

R&D1 went to great pains to achieve the fine balance seen in *Super Metroid*'s item locations, puzzles, boss encounters, and in Samus's acquired abilities and inventory use. It wasn't simply the case that everything fell into position at the first attempt at design either, as Sakamoto reveals: "In a stage following on from an area where the player made lots of discoveries, we'd hold back from pushing the player too far in order to avoid repetition. Balance between difficulty level and player discoveries was crucial. We wanted to avoid creating an on-rails experience – we wanted the player to feel free. But it was incredibly difficult to get that balancing act right. We'd been designing levels in this way since the first game, so we had a lot of experience but we still needed to experiment and build and rebuild."

As well as being a *Metroid* debut for most of the team, *Super Metroid* marked the Super Famicom debut for all concerned. Naturally, this step up presented some hurdles that even the advice of IntSys couldn't equip the team to surmount. "One problem with the shift to the Super Famicom," Sakamoto says, "was that it meant we suddenly needed a lot more sprites and artwork, so we shared the map and enemy design responsibilities throughout the team, with everyone making some input in those areas. But then doing that resulted in a complete mishmash of styles because of each designer's individual preference, so in the end I had to ask Yamane to retouch everything that had been submitted, bringing it all together as one consistent design."

Remarkably, there was no friction within the team even during the frenzied last stage of development, although there was something of a bad smell: "During the final six months of development I didn't know where I lived any more; the Nintendo building – not here, but the old place [in Higashiyama] – became like a boarding house for the *Super Metroid* team," Sakamoto grins. "It got to the stage where I really don't remember going home at all! There was a nap room where it was okay to sleep, but sometimes it was full [of sleeping, overworked *Super Metroid* staff] – those were the worst times, when I wanted to sleep but couldn't, and I didn't have time to go home! There were always between ten and fifteen of us in the office through the night, so we had to take naps in turns. The nap room wasn't being cleaned or looked after at all, because we were always using it; one morning staff from another area came to wake us up and told us that the room smelled like a zoo. Another Nintendo employee put a room freshener in the nap room, but that only made the place pong even worse. Everyone in Nintendo gave us funny looks," Sakamoto laughs. "It's quite sad having only these kinds of memories!"

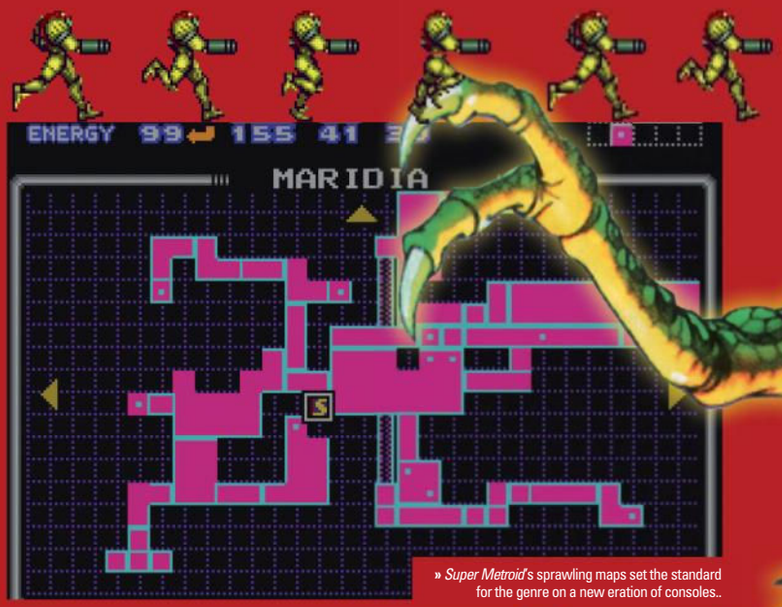
> **"We didn't want to explain things to the player. We wanted to let them be able to work things out for themselves"**

Our talk soon takes a turn from development room stench to the wrath of a Nintendo demigod: Gunpei Yokoi. In his early 50s at the time of *Super Metroid*'s production, Yokoi was the game's general project manager but did not exercise any hands-on control. Sakamoto remembers how his superior viewed *Super Metroid*: "Yokoi-san, who at the time was my section chief and who always had fresh ideas, was always angry when he saw us all completely absorbed and working crazy overtime on *Super Metroid*. He came in and said, 'Are you lot trying to produce a work of art or something?' [Laughs] But this was an epic and we were already way past our deadline, and it seemed we were getting progressively further from our objectives – Yokoi-san was becoming angrier with us day by day during that period. We weren't aware of it, but Kanoh was given a warning by Yokoi-san. Although he was really unhappy with us, and even though he wasn't the type to dish out praise, Yokoi-san was constantly playing *Super Metroid* once we'd finished it – he was hooked. He was playing it so much that I wondered what he was up to. [Laughs] When other developers brought their action games to Nintendo, he'd always compare them with *Super Metroid* and invariably ended up recommending the third-party developer to 'go away and play *Super Metroid*'. That's how fond he was of our game. I suppose this is a better memory than the smelly nap room anecdote," Sakamoto laughs.

"*Super Metroid* was released in '94," he continues, "and development had taken us between two and three years. I don't know how it was perceived throughout the company, but the timing was such that all teams were focused on putting out lots of new SFC games, so there was obviously some expectation that we deliver with *Super Metroid*. We definitely had a lot of support and understanding of the game's concept from people related with the project, and that helped to ensure that we did a good job." Which, as everyone who has played the classic game will quickly attest, is a monumental understatement indeed.

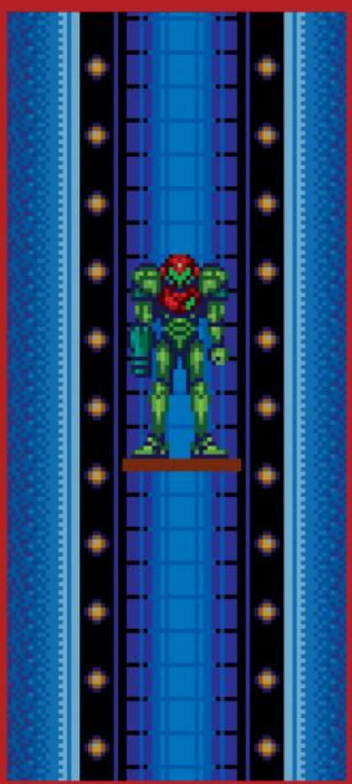
24 megabits, 7 modes

"We used all seven of the hardware modes available," Sakamoto tells me, although he doesn't explain precisely what that means. And how did you use the 24-meg cartridge that ended up housing *Super Metroid*, I ask? "I can't remember!" Sakamoto laughs. There's a pause. "We achieved wonderful graphics and sound by dedicating most of the memory to those features. Yes. Oh, and the game's maps were also quite large, I think. We made good, balanced use of the 24 megabits, anyway – that much I know for sure."



» *Super Metroid*'s sprawling maps set the standard for the genre on a new eration of consoles..

» The last-minute escape from the self-destructing space station has become a familiar opening for *Metroid* games.



» The way in which new abilities open up new areas has been often copied since *Super Metroid*'s release.

The big bosses

Kraid
This first major boss character is literally a monster: he probably missed out on a role in the Chewits adverts purely because he was overqualified. Kraid's weak point is his gob, although he uses his whole being to launch quasi-organic thorns and fireballs in Samus' direction.

Phantoon
A good example of the Super Famicom hardware's transparency effects, Phantoon at times appears to be an apparition; this boss's trick is to flit between protected translucency and a devastatingly powerful solid state, and he likes to launch endless rounds of flaming blue orbs.

Draygon
This yellow-bellied, oversized crustacean is more than just a simple typo. Draygon is a mean swimmer, and its weak points are protected by the shell of a giant lobster. Slightly perversely, *Super Metroid* encourages you to vanquish Draygon by electrocuting it until its flesh turns purple.

Ridley
An homage – in name alone, obviously – to *Alien* director Ridley Scott, whose film was a major inspiration to the series, this senior Space Pirate appears once at the start of *Super Metroid* and again, in more powerful – yet paradoxically more vulnerable – form, towards the end of the game.

Mother Brain
The enigmatic final boss of *Super Metroid* is essentially a lump of deskulled brain. However, Mother Brain protects itself with dynamic weapons and the glass casing of a robo-suit, and when that fails, it connects to the neck of a bio-mechanical bodysuit. Afterwards, Samus again has to run for her life.

CONTRA III
THE ALIEN WARS

It's without doubt one of the greatest Super Nintendo games of all time, one of the best games in the *Contra* series, and also one of the finest run-and-gun games ever. Oh, and did we mention that it's one of the best games ever too? That it's taken us 89 issues to finally give *Contra III* a classic game analysis is somewhat strange, but the reason lies in the fact that the game is so exceptional that we just assumed we already had. A masterclass in game pacing, set pieces and basically just great level design, from the very minute you start *Contra III* to the sweaty, jubilation-filled second you finally beat it on the hardest setting and see the game's ending, the action is relentless, the challenge high and the gameplay intense. The year is 2636, and Stuart Hunt is helping two commandos, Sully and Jimbo, win an epic alien war.

THE ARMOURY

Machine gun
The default weapon in the game. It's pretty powerful and really quite effective at taking out much that the game throws at you.

Laser
As laser-based weapons do, this fires a concentrated line of powerful radiation. It's highly powerful, but using it requires a good aim.

Spread gun
Though the weakest weapon in the game, the spread gun makes short work of enemies attacking from different heights.

Crush missiles
Blue in colour, these are the most powerful weapons in the game. They explode on contact, and are really effective against bosses.

Flamethrower
The flamethrower is an effective close-quarters combat tool that is great for taking down bosses and cindering weak spots.

Homing missiles
Moderately powerful homing missiles will hunt enemies down. It's a really effective weapon against the airborne aliens.

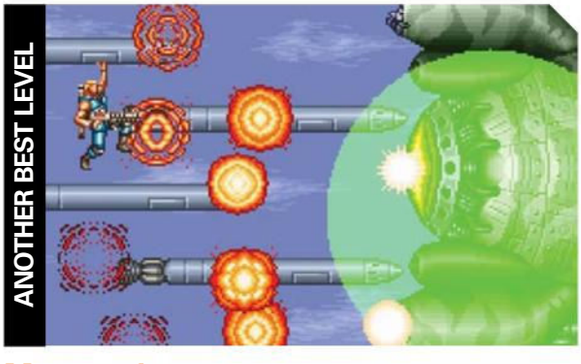
MEMORABLE MOMENTS

Contra just got better

The original *Contra* reinvented the run-and-gun genre, introducing many elements that countless games adopted. The follow-ups prior to *Contra III* offered a decent helping of action, but they didn't measure up to the original. *Contra III*, however, marked a giant leap forward. It was everything you would expect from a *Contra* game, but with bigger weapons, bigger explosions, bigger bosses, a new post-apocalyptic setting and a motorcycle level. Set piece after set piece, the game was a tour de force of imagination, deft level design and special effects that hasn't aged a single day.

Smart bomb

Many fans will have their favourite weapon. Some love the laser. Others will like the weaker but lovely spread gun, as it makes killing foes an absolute breeze. There are others who will like the flamethrower, as it's great for when you get up close. Therefore, picking a best weapon is a bit of a thankless endeavour, and one we chickened out of by virtue of us going with the smart bomb. It might look like a metal turnip, but release it into the game's atmosphere and see the screen turn hazy, killing grunts with ease and knocking a large chunk off the energy of the game's bosses.



Motorcycle

Given that there are so many great action set pieces in *Contra III*, we had to give a mention to another of its fantastic levels. The motorcycle stage deserves a look in, as it's basically just one giant action set piece. The stage begins with the player astride a 2636 era Ducati, blasting flying aliens before a giant frigate appears, its undercarriage primed with heavy ordnance. Survive this vicious gauntlet and the ship takes to the air, you chasing after it. This leads on to the most insane bit in the entire game: blasting the ship's glowing arse while hopping between missiles being fired at it.

Start as you mean to end

With so many memorable moments in *Contra III*, picking just one was impossible. As the opening stage is a great example of how to grab a teenager's attention and make them part with birthday money, we had to mention it. Within the first few minutes you're gunning down aliens and mutant dogs, hopping into a tank to flatten foes, sampling nearly all of the weapons in the game, dodging a plane as it bombs the city, jumping through the flaming ruins while taking out a wave of winged aliens and finally facing off against a giant, bullet-spewing alien tortoise. It's one of the best opening levels of any videogame.

The massive Terminator

There really was only one boss we could highlight here. And typical of memorable 16-bit bosses, it is something that didn't exactly err on the side of caution as far as copyright was concerned. The giant T-800-alike that rips through the level's wall at the end of the third stage is a tricky one. First, you see his claws pierce the wall, pulling it apart as if it was made of tinfoil, before seeing his beaming red eyes glowing in the darkness. The beast then emerges, firing lasers from its eyes, lobbing bombs into the playing field and breathing fire too. The only thing it doesn't do is ride a motorcycle and shoot up a police station.

Arachnophobia

From the map in *A Link To The Past* to pseudo-3D like *F-Zero* and *Pilotwings*, the cream of early Super Nintendo games used the console's Mode 7 technique to show off the power of the console, and *Contra III* was no different, proving a great showcase of the versatility of the effect. It was used to create dazzling explosions, two top-down levels, and also several bosses. The first Mode 7 boss is a large robotic spider that scuttles along the floor before jumping into the air, scaling bigger and filling the screen before disappearing, and then making a quick descent in a bid to crush Sully and Jimbo.

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **GENRE:** RUN-AND-GUN

What the press said… ages ago

Mean Machines 95%
Anyone who doubts the abilities of the Super NES should take a look at this – it's unbelievable! The graphics, sounds, special effects and varied, highly addictive gameplay are all absolutely outstanding.

What we think

Standing alongside *Gunstar Heroes* and *Metal Slug*, *Contra III* is the pinnacle of run-and-gun gaming, and has still yet to be bettered. It's an outstanding game.

MODE 7 HEAVEN

We look back at some of the best and lesser-known examples of Mode 7, the famous graphics mode that became a hallmark for many early Super Nintendo releases and helped elevate Nintendo gaming during the Nineties

Contra III: The Alien Wars

Best Mode 7 moment: The opening stage
Year: 1992
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-house

The foremost thing to remember about SNES Mode 7 is that its powers are ineffective on game sprites. However, Mode 7 can rotate and increase the size of background images to give the impression they're animated; to create a 'Mode 7 sprite' (a term we've just made up but feel is befitting). Developers are also able to go a step further by adding moving parts made of sprites to really mess with our heads. For two really good examples of this technique in action look no further than the epic first stage of *Contra III: The Alien Wars*, which is packed with Mode 7 moments. The low-flying plane that turns up midway through the game's first stage forms part of a background layer and is animated using Mode 7 (as it comes closer to the screen its size increases and its wings bank slightly). However, the bombs that it drops are sprites. Similarly, the body, neck and head of the turtle boss that awaits at the end of the stage also sits in the background, while the bullets it fires and moving legs are sprites. These are two of the best examples of Mode 7 being used by a developer to create believable animated objects in games.

Chrono Trigger

Best Mode 7 moment: The crazy racing mini-game
Year: 1995
Publisher: Squaresoft
Developer: In-house

There are many examples of Mode 7 being put to good use in Square's epic time-travelling RPG *Chrono Trigger*, but our favourite is the Jetbike mini-game found in the Beyond The Ruins future chapter. While most racing games use Mode 7 to generate into-the-screen tracks, *Chrono Trigger* shows the effect being put to use in a side-on racing scenario – although the shoulder buttons allow you to rotate the camera. The fun and challenging mini-game proved so popular among fans that Square later released a standalone digital version for the Sattellaview titled *Chrono Trigger: Jet Bike Special*.

Demon's Crest

Best Mode 7 moment: Getting around
Year: 1994
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-house

Demon's Crest is a superb action/platformer that is every bit as atmospheric and challenging as its famous cousin *Ghosts 'n Goblins*. The third part of the excellent *Gargoyle's Quest* series, *Demon's Crest* made this list purely for its neat world map, which, thanks to some Mode 7 magic, allowed you to navigate and land on it *Pilotwings* fashion to replay stages.

Super Castlevania IV

Best Mode 7 moment: Fighting Koronot
Year: 1991
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-house

The nightmare world of *Castlevania* is the perfect environment for Mode 7 to do its thing, and Konami put it to great use in *Super Castlevania IV*. Mode 7 can be seen in the game's map screen, its rotating stages, those cool rocking chandeliers on Stage 5 and even in some of its more memorable bosses. And this brings us rather nicely to our favourite Mode 7 moment in the game – the stone golem boss Koronot. Fought at the end of stage four, every time you hit him with the Vampire Killer he shrinks in size and causes the sky to hail stones. That is until you make that final killer blow and he expands to fill the entire screen.

Super Mario Kart

Best Mode 7 moment:
Rainbow Road
Year: 1992
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house

Though *F-Zero* was the first game to show the exhilarating things Mode 7 could bring to racing games, it was clear there was room for refinement. *F-Zero*'s glitzy, neon-coloured racer is certainly fast and pretty, but its racing gets shown up for being shallow when compared to *Super Mario Kart*. *Super Mario Kart* is *F-Zero* but with more intricate tracks, modes and sprites (characters, weapons, power-ups and annoying flat moles). It raised the bar of Mode 7 application, but it also spawned Nintendo's most successful-ever racing franchise. It would also be remiss of us to not mention that Mode 7 marks the first time the bright, vibrant and colourful world of the *Mario* franchise was presented in a way resembling believable 3D. That it was also immensely playable didn't do much to hurt its success either.

We expose blatant Super Mario Kart copycarts

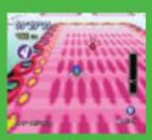
Kat's Run

This obscure racer plays like a *Gran Turismo* take on *Super Mario Kart*. After picking your driver from the ten spiky-haired racers on offer, you select your vehicle and then compete in street races. Because *Kat's Run* is grounded in reality both visually and track-wise it suffers. With dull circuits and visuals, it is unfortunately one of the least impressive Mode 7 racers on Super Nintendo.

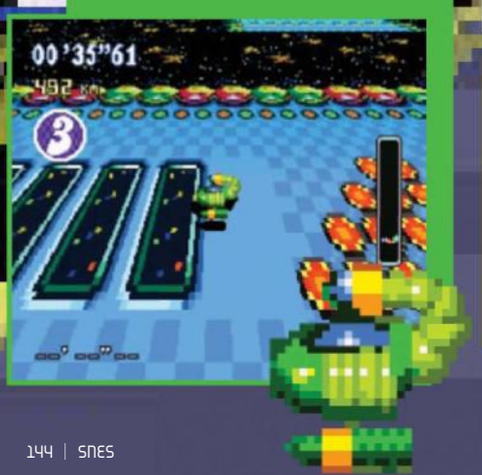
SD F-1 Grand Prix

The most blatant *Super Mario Kart* clone ever produced, *SD F-1 Grand Prix* stars a cast of cuddly super deformed (SD) critters and a few tracks which ape those in Nintendo's racer. As it sticks so close to the *Mario Kart* template it's unsurprising it's a decent racer. The irony though is that it's part of an established racing franchise (Video System's *F1 Grand Prix*) that predates *Super Mario Kart*. One of the more impressive Mode 7 racers.

Uchuu Race: Astro Go! Go!



The colourful eye-bursting result of what happens when you mix two parts *F-Zero* with one part *Super Mario Kart*, *Uchuu Race* is a bright, cutesy cartoonish future racer. The game's most notable thing is that you can turn your craft 360 degrees. As a result, the controls can feel erratic initially and make the more challenging pinball-style obstacle-packed stages quite frustrating. Overall though, it's a decent if imitative racer.



Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles IV: Turtles in Time

Best Mode 7 moment: Foot Soldier fling
Year: 1992
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-house

The most vivid Mode 7 scenes are often those that took us by surprise. Those moments we'd be sat playing game X and then all of a sudden a cool Mode 7 trick would materialize from out of nowhere. Though this SNES port features a great Mode 7 recreation of the arcade game's thrilling hoverboard stage, it's the Foot Soldier-towards-camera fling that stuck in our minds most. Capturing the slapstick nature of the cartoon perfectly, seeing it never gets boring. In fact, we'd even go so far as to say it's a frontrunner for the best Mode 7 moment ever.

Exhaust Heat

Best Mode 7 moment: Pitting
Year: 1992
Publisher: Seta Corporation
Developer: In-house

Exhaust Heat is a very different racer to Nintendo's more famous Mode 7 offerings. Its charm and speed are slow coming, with its tracks (based on real circuits) feeling a bit empty by comparison and exhilarating racing only arriving once you've enough money to upgrade your car. But be patient, and you'll find that *Exhaust Heat* is a great racer with some subtle sim elements. Wonderfully presented throughout, our standout Mode 7 moment occurs when you enter a pit and the camera seamlessly rotates to the side of your car.

Run Saber

Best Mode 7 moment: Plane battle
Year: 1993
Publisher: Atlus Co.
Developer: Horisoft

Often dubbed as the *Super Nintendo Strider*, owing to starring two lithe plasma sword-waving heroes able to cling to walls and do fancy somersaults, *Run Saber* is an imitative but entertaining action game. Mode 7 was often used by developers as a way to insert something memorable to boss encounters, and this is demonstrated by *Run Saber*'s first boss. A battle that takes place in the sky, you have to fight a disembodied biomechanical Medusa head while clinging desperately to an F-14 Tomcat that loops in the air.

ActRaiser

Best Mode 7 moment: World map
Year: 1990
Publisher: Enix Corporation
Developer: Quintet

Anyone who has played this unusual city building hack-and-slash marriage will attest that its title screen really utilises Mode 7. Yes, it's just a spinning word, but it grabs your attention. For us though, the best Mode 7 moment has to be when you enter a new stage. Starting from high up in your heavenly hub palace, you see the camera spiral towards the overworld map and home in on the level.

HyperZone

Best Mode 7 moment: First stage
Year: 1991
Publisher: HAL Laboratory
Developer: In-house

HyperZone was an early release for the console and arrived the very same month as the console's US release. Playing like a lovely sounding cross between *F-Zero* and *Space Harrier*, you steer a tubby spaceship through a series of eight colourful Mode 7-created courses, shooting unimaginative enemies until you come up against a slightly less unimaginative looking boss. The stages tracks also have strict lanes to follow, and straying from them causes your ship take damage *F-Zero*-style. While this does help to add a subtle racing feel to the shooting, there's not much fun or variety in *HyperZone*. It's a clear case of Mode 7 over substance – thankfully, and surprisingly, a road the majority of Mode 7 games chose not to follow.

Super Mario World

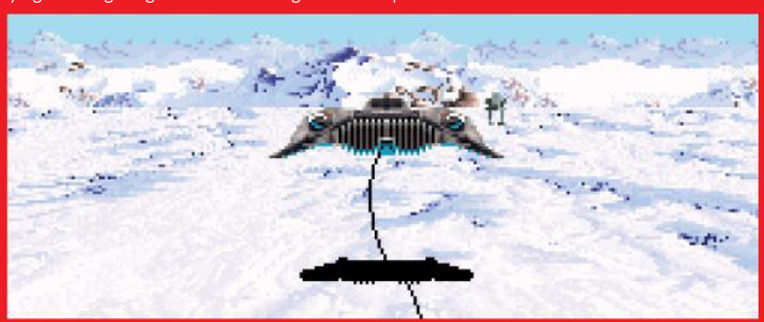
Best Mode 7 moment: Fighting Bowser
Year: 1990
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house

After revisiting *Mario*'s epic 16-bit adventure to write this feature we were surprised to discover that there weren't as many instances of Mode 7 being utilised as we remember. It's mostly used in the boss fights, where it can be seen creating the see-sawing platform you fight Iggy Koopa on and helping Morton Koopa JR. scale the inner walls of his castle. Nintendo saved the best example for last though, with a memorable final battle against Bowser that saw him dropping fireballs, enemies and giant cannonballs from inside a Dr. Robotnik-esque clown-faced flying machine. Breaking from his attack sequences to steer it backwards and then fly it towards the camera until that silly, smug clown face filled the entire screen, if that didn't motivate players into finishing the fight nothing would…Well maybe the added sight of seeing Princess Toadstool appear from inside the device to do her damsel-in-distress bit.

Super Star Wars – The Empire Strikes Back

Best Mode 7 moment: Battle of Hoth
Year: 1993
Publisher: LucasArts
Developer: Sculptured Software

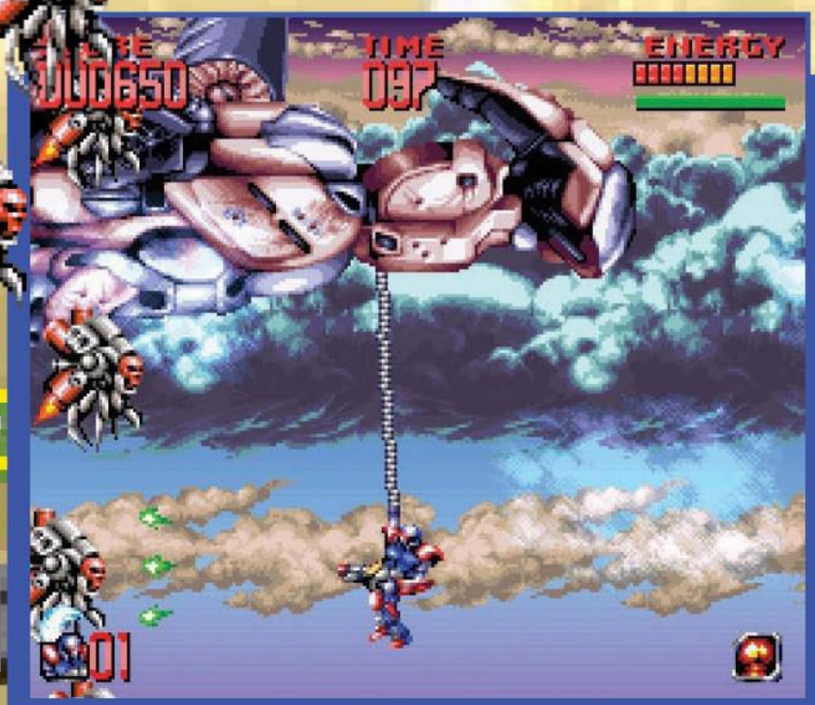
The Battle of Hoth has been restaged in videogames numerous times, and most have provided great set-piece moments – or in the case of the 2600 an entire game. This epic Mode 7 stage was the most faithful recreation of the epic snow fight. With some stunning undulating Hoth terra firma to fly over, the mission tasks you with destroying a set number of varied targets, ranging from Probe Droids to AT-ATs. The stage then gets really awesome when it introduces AT-AT Walkers to the fight and allows you to take them down by cable-tying their legs together and causing them to trip over and kiss the snow.



Super Soccer

Best Mode 7 moment: Kick-off
Year: 1992
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Human Entertainment

While *Super Tennis* used Mode 7 in a subtle way – it was used on its intro screen and as a way to circle the camera around the court when players swapped ends, *Super Soccer* was much more blatant in its usage. The impressive looking but fidgety feeling football pitch certainly brought a few issues; the action felt a little sluggish, it wasn't always easy to judge passes and tackles, and for one half of the match you were running up a pitch you couldn't actually see. However, the jaunty graphics and unique perspective still won you over. *Super Soccer* isn't the greatest football game, but it certainly captures the fun nature of the sport, especially in multiplayer.



Super Turrican 2

Best Mode 7 moment: Worm boss
Year: 1995
Publisher: Ocean
Developer: Factor 5

Super Turrican 2 really puts the Super Nintendo through its paces. Though it doesn't have the *Metroid* feel of the 8-bit original, it's a real showcase of fancy Super Nintendo visual effects, and provides no shortage of great Mode 7 moments. Our choice picks include the giant Mode 7 Sarlacc-style worm boss that you have to fight from inside its gaping mouth, the superb robotic spider boss, and the neat into-the-screen racing/shooter sections. Developed by Factor 5, who is probably most well-known for the *Star Wars Rogue Squadron* series of Nintendo games, it's a truly fantastic shooter with visuals, imagination and set-piece moments that easily meet those high points of *Contra 3*, and Chris Hueslbeck's soundtrack is brilliant too. A polished and sensational shooter, it's just a shame that copies go for so much money these days.

F-Zero

Best Mode 7 moment: First track
Year: 1990
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house

While *F-Zero* may not be the most deep racing experience, if seen as Nintendo trying to show that its new console could easily handle an arcade-style racing game then it certainly achieves its goal. Said to be loosely connected to the obscure NES racer *Mach Rider*, which started its life as a plastic toy bike back when Nintendo was a toy maker, *F-Zero* was a perfect showcase for what the Mode 7 could do. Not only was *F-Zero* a launch game for the console but it was also the first game to utilise Mode 7, which here is used to create its stunning pseudo 3D tracks. Allowing the racing to feel incredibly fast and smooth as it wasn't pushing around intricate track and level designs – something which has remained a speed over detail hallmark for the series, nothing touched it in terms of exhilaration and visuals. It even left some arcade games eating its dust.

On The Ball

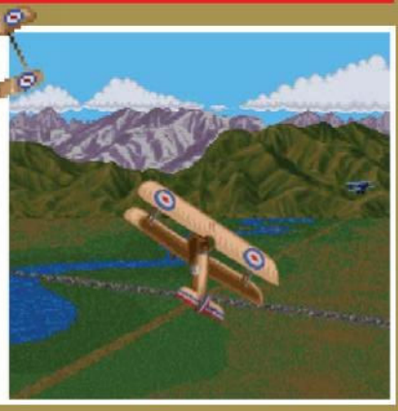
Best Mode 7 moment: Goal!!!
Year: 1992
Publisher: Taito Corporation
Developer: In-house

On The Ball is an on point SNES conversion of Taito's superb 1989 arcade puzzle game *Cameltry*. If you're unfamiliar with it, your objective is to steer a ball through a labyrinth and reach a goal before time expires. As the game progresses, the mazes become more devilish as more obstacles get thrown into the mix, including blocks that knock seconds off your time if you touch them, and traffic light gates that, well, we're sure you all know how traffic lights work. With your players rotating the maze rather than the ball to move it around, *On The Ball* was pretty much built for Mode 7. Thus it's a superb and faithful conversion, and though it could have benefitted from being a little bit longer, is still a must for puzzle fans.

Wings 2: Aces High

Best Mode 7 moment: The map
Year: 1992
Publisher: Namco
Developer: Malibu

Namco's *Wings 2: Aces High* was WWI placed and made great use of Mode 7. Piloting a WWI biplane, you have to complete a series of bombing and dog fight missions that build up to an aerial battle with the German Top Gun, Red Baron. Mode 7 is used here in two different ways: to create realistic 3D scrolling ground effects as you're flying through the air, and on the bombing missions to zoom the camera towards the floor as your plane flies towards it. The latter is particularly successful as the ground looks crisper the closer you are to it.



Super Mario RPG: Legend Of The Seven Stars

Best Mode 7 moment: Mine car challenge
Year: 1996
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house

Super Mario RPG is packed with mini-games, but this one is our favourite. Found at the end of the Molehill area, the Mode 7 mine car section serves as both a neat distraction and way to take you to the next section of the adventure. As the car moves on rails (obviously), players have to collect mushrooms and coins and jump any breaks in the track. There are also two Mode 7 side-scrolling sections that add a bit of extra variety to the action too.

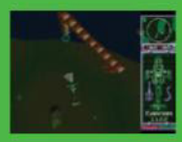
The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past

Best Mode 7 moment: Map of Hyrule
Year: 1991
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house

Hyrule is such a big part of any *Zelda* adventure, so it seems fitting that Nintendo would want to do something special with the map screen. The Mode 7 map plays a prominent part in its gameplay and story, with players not only relying on it to get around the huge world but also allowing them to see the full effects and differences between its light and dark incarnations. It is without doubt one of the most iconic and fondly remembered game maps in history.

Mode 7 Mirrors

Mega Drive



The Mega Drive is unable to do Mode 7 but there are games that show the console doing impressive graphics tricks. For a similar rotational effect look at the top-down shooter *Red Zone* in action, or for some exhilarating into-the-screen shooting see *Burning Force.*

Atari Lynx

The Atari Lynx was capable of generating Mode 7-style scaling and rotation effects two years before the Super Nintendo. And the Lynx could actually even go a step better by being able to rotate and scale individual sprites, an effect noticeable in games like *Pit Fighter* and *California Games.*

Sega Mega CD

Sega's ill fated CD-Rom add-on for the Mega Drive was capable of Mode 7 effects. Perhaps the most famous example is the 3D bonus stages of *Sonic CD,* which saw Sonic running in a 3D rotating world trying to get those pesky Chaos Emeralds.

Pilotwings

Best Mode 7 moment: Free falling
Year: 1990
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house

Whichever way you cut it, *Pilotwings* just wouldn't have been possible without Mode 7, and that's because here it isn't used to create a fancy background effect, boss or map, but – in a rare instance – an open-feeling world. By Nintendo choosing to base its game in a Flight School rather than the usual po-faced military scenario, it showed that flight sims could be universally fun and accessible. An early release for the Super Nintendo (it was a launch title for the console in the US and Europe), *Pilotwings* was unique. There was nothing really like it on the console market at the time, and it showed perhaps better than any other SNES game the immersive and engaging properties that Mode 7 brought to the table. If you removed Mode 7 from *Pilotwings* then the screen would be as empty and as black as space… or a better metaphor: nothingness. In *Pilotwings*, Mode 7 hardly ever sleeps. It's always in the background working away and showing off the impressive rotation and scaling effects it could generate. For all intents and purposes, *Pilotwings* is *Mode 7: The Videogame.*

SUPER MARIO WORLD

Nintendo's magnum opus sold over 20 million copies and helped launch the Super Nintendo. Nick Thorpe takes a look back at one of the greatest platformers of all time

When Nintendo finally entered the 16-bit console race in November 1990, it was in the unfamiliar position of having to stake its claim to market leadership against real competition. The company responded in typical fashion, by launching the Super Famicom with possibly the greatest one-two punch in videogame history. The turbo-charged Mode 7 racer *F-Zero* offered plenty of substance, but its appeal hinged on style and the lure of the unfamiliar. It was Nintendo's way of demonstrating technological superiority. On the other hand, *Super Mario World* definitely looked the part, but its main function was to provide substance and familiarity (in fact, the game bore the subtitle *Super Mario Bros. 4* in Japan). With it, Nintendo intended to reaffirm its position as the world's leading developer of videogames – and it succeeded.

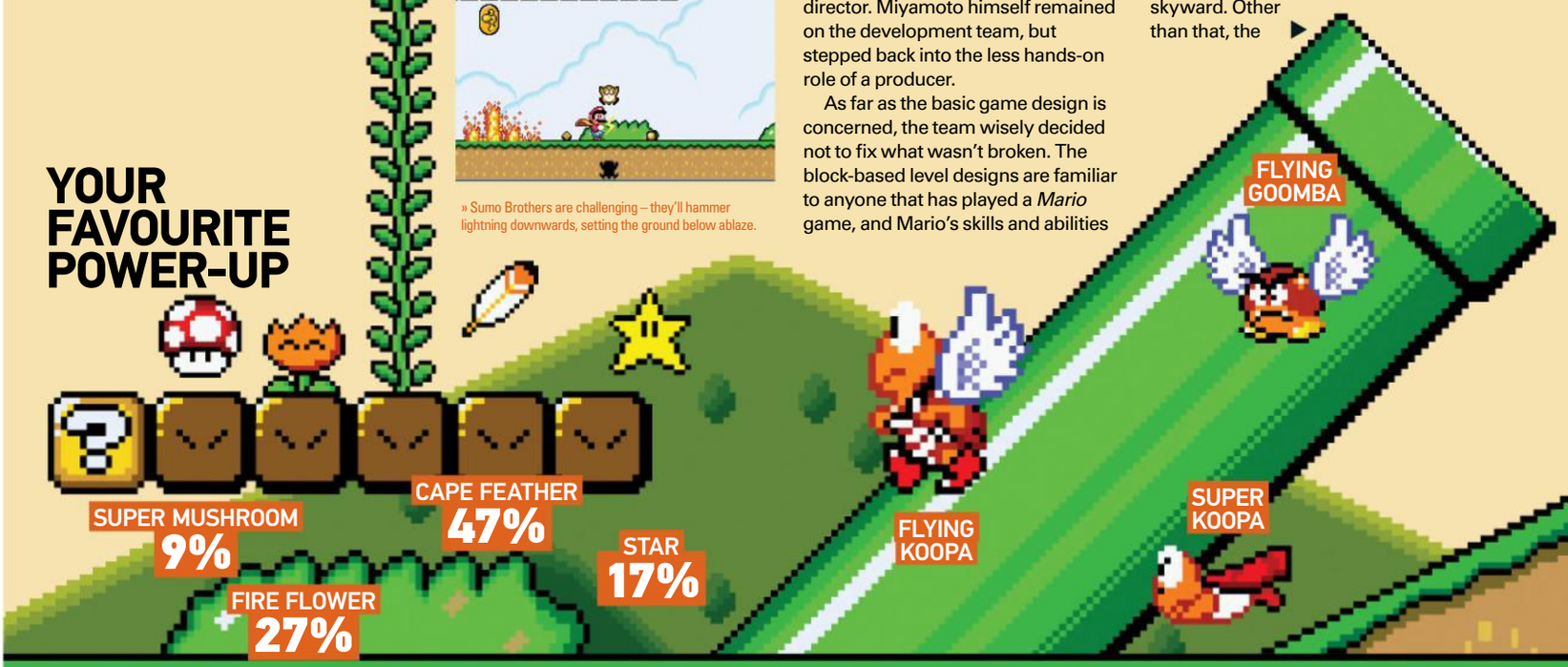
» Sumo Brothers are challenging – they'll hammer lightning downwards, setting the ground below ablaze.

To advance the game past its superb predecessors, Nintendo assigned a mixture of veteran hands and new talent to develop *Super Mario World*. Of the 15-strong team that developed the game, nine were returning from *Super Mario Bros. 3* and one had previously worked on *Super Mario Bros. 2*, while the remaining five had no prior credits and injected some fresh insight. The other major change was a new lead game director – in this case Takashi Tezuka, who had previously served alongside Shigeru Miyamoto as an assistant director and later co-director. Miyamoto himself remained on the development team, but stepped back into the less hands-on role of a producer.

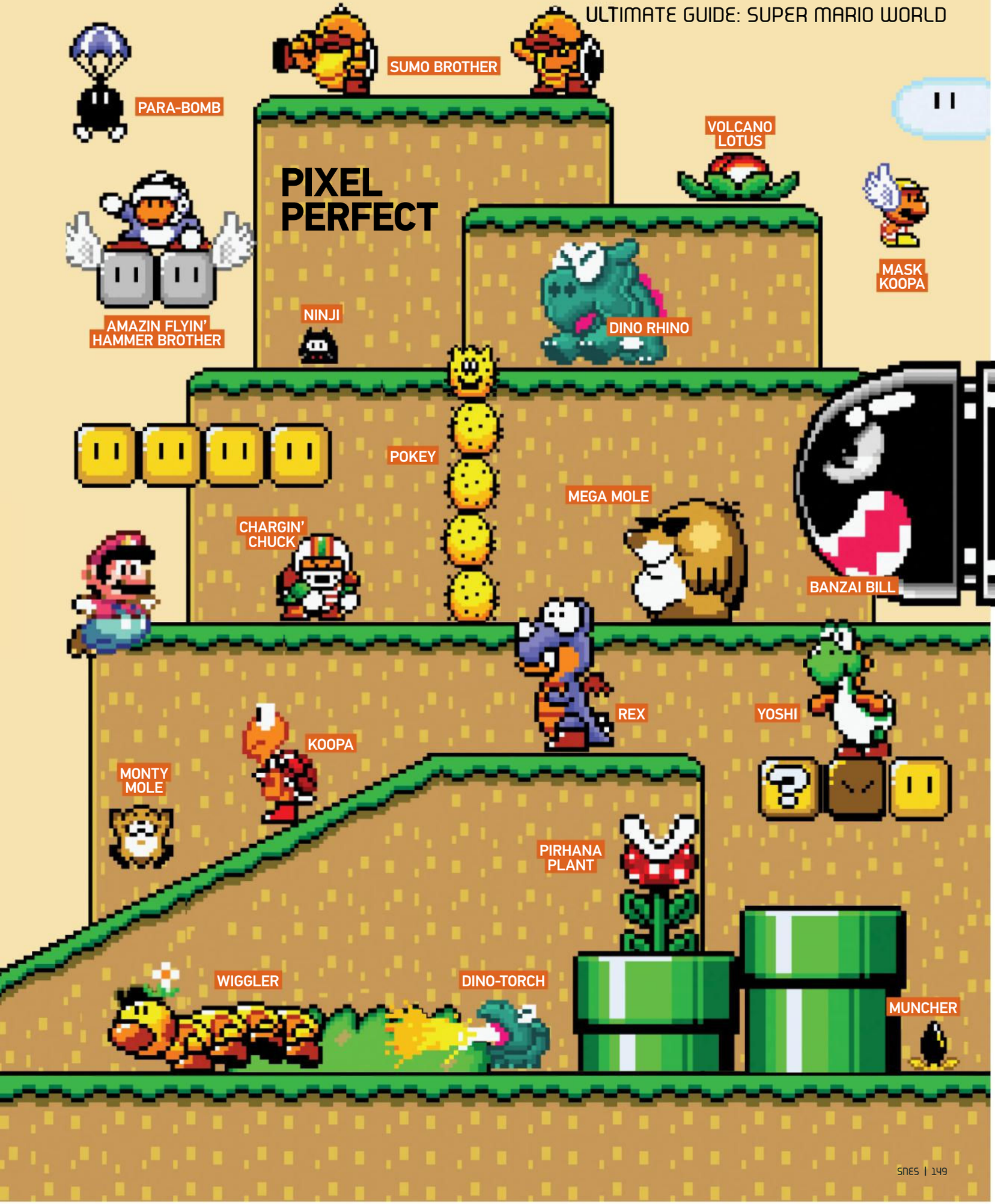
As far as the basic game design is concerned, the team wisely decided not to fix what wasn't broken. The block-based level designs are familiar to anyone that has played a *Mario* game, and Mario's skills and abilities are largely drawn from *Super Mario Bros. 3*, albeit with a few tweaks. The variety of special forms was scaled back to Fire Mario and Caped Mario (a new form, but one functionally similar to Raccoon Mario), and Mario retained the ability to kick carried items but could not boot them skyward. Other than that, the

» This swarm of Bullet Bills is testament to the fact that there's a real challenge present.

YOUR FAVOURITE POWER-UP



PIXEL PERFECT



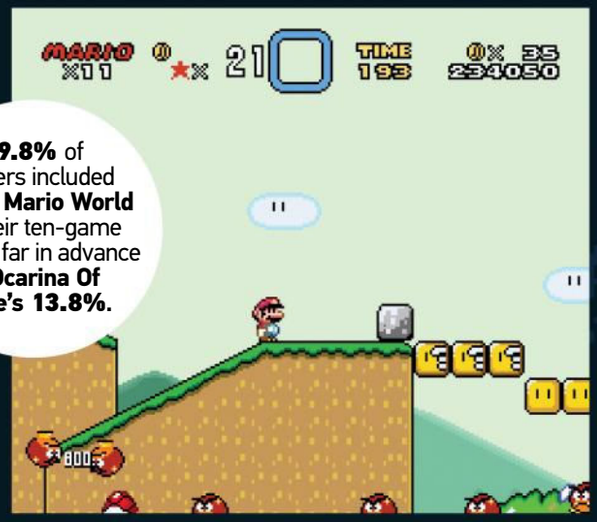
GAME BOY ADVANTAGE

Super Mario World only has one non-emulated conversion and Super Mario Advance 2: Super Mario World is certainly interesting…

When Nintendo chose to bring *Super Mario World* to the Game Boy Advance back in 2001, it came across with a variety of changes. The most notable of these is related to Luigi. As well as using his revised sprites from the *Super Mario All-Stars* edition of *Super Mario World*, he's got his high jump and slippery run back from previous games. Other characters have also had a graphical touch-up, and the visuals have been brightened all-round due to the lack of a backlight in the original Game Boy Advance model. While the music has all been retained, there are definite differences in sound due to the differences in sound hardware between the SNES and Game Boy Advance. However, Mario, Luigi, the Koopalings and the Boos have all gained voices. There's also a brand new intro sequence featuring Mario, Luigi and Peach.

In terms of game design, a few changes have been made – Dragon Coins have been added to stages that didn't previously feature them, and your spin jump protects you from more enemies than in the original. Once you've encountered a coloured Yoshi, you can find them in regular stages by finding an egg with certain power-ups. Additionally, if you've got the cape or fire powers, taking a hit won't send you straight back to your small form. The game can also be saved at any time. No matter which version you play, *Super Mario World* is an amazing game, but the changes may cause purists to stick to the original SNES version.

SPIKE TOP



19.8% of readers included **Super Mario World** on their ten-game ballot – far in advance of **Ocarina Of Time's 13.8%.**

» *Super Mario World* offers visual cues – these slopes make the solution to this line of enemies obvious.

portly plumber gained a new companion in the form of Yoshi, a dinosaur that will grant him a ride and eat quite a few of the enemies that stand in his way.

The major innovation of *Super Mario World* was its structure. *Super Mario Bros.* had introduced the concept of multiple stage exits with its Warp Zones, and *Super Mario Bros. 3* had introduced a world map to the series. What *Super Mario World* did was to combine the two concepts into a non-linear experience. Whenever a stage had more than one exit, there was usually a good reason to seek that extra exit – at the very minimum it could lead to a secret stage, but it might also lead to a warp or even one of the game's Switch Palace stages. When completed, each of the four Switch Palaces activated appropriately coloured blocks throughout the game – you could tell where they were meant to be thanks to the appearance of their coloured outlines. Often they just made things a little easier by blocking off pits or providing extra platforms, but occasionally they would be crucial to making progress.

In retrospect, *Super Mario World* is surprisingly economical with its resources, given its status as a showcase game for a new console. Take the game's music as an example – Koji Kondo's soundtrack makes excellent use of theme and variation. When you first hear the overworld music, you get your first experience of a melody that persists throughout the game, forming the basis for almost every piece of action music from the underground and underwater stages to the castles and ghost houses. Likewise, while it's always visually enticing, *Super Mario World*'s wealth of levels means that it inevitably reuses backgrounds and objects frequently. What's more, the game makes sparse use of the console's advanced graphical features – where other designers might be tempted to design in such a way that highlights them, transparency and Mode 7 scaling and rotation are only deployed where they make sense in the context of the game design.

That's the real genius of *Super Mario World*, though – it is a textbook example of a design team managing to make a lot from a little, because fresh ideas are never in short supply. You can take the scenic route through the game, taking in as many stages as possible on the way to the climactic fight with Bowser, and never encounter the contempt that repetition breeds. When you encounter a tense section in which you hop between moving platforms as buzzsaws hurtle towards you, that's the only time it'll happen. Even late in the game, you'll find new ideas, like a maze built from overlapping

THWOMP

» Blargg is a sneaky foe, checking that you're approaching before it emerges from the lava.

» Secret exits are the key to *Super Mario World*'s long-term appeal (pun definitely intended).

» Mario's new dinosaur pal stomps enemies efficiently, but gains far more from eating them.

BUZZY BEETLE

WIZARD

PORCU-PUFFER

BLURPS

RIP VAN FISH

LIL SPARKY

THE SHORTEST ROAD

Do you want to beat this classic, but are pressed for time? Worry not – with this guide, you'll have the game finished quick

1 Start with Yoshi's Island 2 and play normally until you reach Donut Plains 1. Once you get there, grab a cape from a Super Koopa. Use it to fly to the key near the end of the stage for a secret exit.

2 In Donut Secret 1, you'll need to find another secret exit – you can do this by finding a P Switch, then using it to turn these blocks into coins so you can retrieve the key from the Question Block.

3 Donut Secret House has a hidden boss fight – you'll need to trigger this vine, pictured above, then use a P Switch to reveal a door at the top. Beat the Big Boo and you'll gain access to Star Road.

4 Beat each Star World stage by finding its secret exit. In Star World 2, you can acquire a blue Yoshi which gains the ability to fly when its mouth is full – make sure you leave the stage with it.

5 In Star World 4, use your Yoshi to fly beneath a section of blocks to reach the exit. You can now access Bowser's Castle and beat the game, having seen just 12 of the game's 72 stages.

SWOOPERS

HOT HEAD

"Super Mario World is surprisingly economical with its resources"

layers of moving rock. Those ideas which are re-used, such as the new puzzle-centric Ghost House stages, are presented in ways which leave each encounter feeling distinct.

What's all the more surprising is that this level of creativity is found in the series' fourth game. Some of it can be attributed to the power of the SNES allowing the designers to do things that had previously proven impossible, and the addition of a save battery certainly enabled the enormous game world to be realised. However, credit must also go to the development team for breaking new ground when it would have been easy to just provide a slightly prettier version of what had gone before.

But *Super Mario World* was all the more special because it represented the end of an era, as the last traditional 2D *Mario* platformer to hit a home console for many a year. *Yoshi's Island* was a marked departure from the traditional Mario style, and Nintendo took its mascot into the world of 3D for his next major console game. By the time Mario's side-scrolling adventures returned in the *New Super Mario Bros.* series, traditional pixel art and chiptunes had been left behind and things never quite felt the same.

According to your votes, *Super Mario World* is the greatest game of all time. It's not hard to see why, because it comprises all the things about gaming that people love. It looks nice, sounds wonderful and is masterfully designed, offering players an experience that can be enjoyed in whichever way they prefer. If you want depth and discovery, *Super Mario World* can give you that. If you want to make your way to the end as quickly as possible through brute force, that's allowed too. It represents familiarity, as a sequel featuring one of the most recognisable characters not just in gaming, but in all of pop culture. However, as a launch game, it also represents the thrill of new things – that unforgettable rush of excitement you experienced when you saw hardware doing things you'd never thought possible, and the unbounded possibilities that presented themselves in your mind as a result. It's a game that can be – and has been – enjoyed by players of all ages, from all over the world.

Shared nostalgia is what brings us together as retro gamers, and according to you lot, no other game appeals quite so broadly. All hail Mario – the King Of Games.

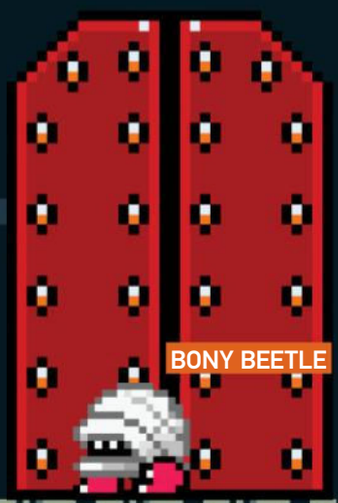
» Hanging off a dangling rope while avoiding buzzsaws is a unique thrill – it only comes up once.

» The boss themes use the same melody as the action stages, but they feel completely different.

THWIMP

BOO BUDDIES

» Ghost Houses typically offer simple obstacles but tricky navigation, requiring brainpower over quick reflexes.



DRY BONES

URCHIN

FISHBONES

TORPEDO TED

Q&A: ROBERT FENNELL

Known online as GreenDeathFlavor, this speedrunner shares his insight on demolishing Mario's finest game

When did you first encounter *Super Mario World*, and what did you make of it?

My first encounter with *Super Mario World* happened in 1992, when we got a Super Nintendo and my siblings and I were playing in the living room. I was a Mario kid – we had all of the *Mario* games. My best *Mario* memory is when I was first in our house to beat *Super Mario Bros.*.

What's your fastest completion time for *Super Mario World*, and how did you achieve it?

My fastest completion is in 9 minutes 47 seconds (9:47.58). I acheived that in January 2015, breaking a tie between myself and dram55 when we both had a personal best of exactly 9:48.98.

The run was done using a glitch in the game known as the 'cloud glitch'. When Mario collects a coin that Yoshi is about to eat, it gets replaced by the next available sprite, in this case, the Chargin' Chuck. Chargin' Chucks have the ability to give power-ups when eaten. In 2014, it was discovered that you can eat a Chargin' Chuck as small Mario and the game will give you a Lakitu cloud. The Lakitu cloud is useful because it can manipulate Bowser in the Bowser fight, making him stop instantly when it's moving off-screen to the left. This means you can complete the final battle up to a minute faster.

In January I finally got a solid run with a good Bowser battle which resulted in a new record which has stood for ten months now, but is beatable. The record could very well come down a full second or more with a perfect run.

Why is *Super Mario World* such a good game to speedrun?

I believe it's a good game to speedrun because it's a relatively easy game to learn. A lot of levels are beatable by just flying over them. There's also a lot of variety with this game. If you're looking for a fast easy run you can do any level. If you're looking for something a bit longer you can do no Star World. Of course, there's 96-Exit where you beat every level in the game. You could even challenge yourself with the no cape category.

What techniques are essential for any *Super Mario World* speedrunner to succeed?

You should play through the game a bit to get used to the game and its physics. Then practice every level and watch videos to learn new strategies. New runners can find videos for every level on smwwiki.com. I like to use a lot of visual and sound cues. I think it's important to find these cues for executing moves with tight input windows. When you have all the basics down you can begin to study and learn glitches if your goal is to get a fast time.

If you really get into *SMW* speedrunning and learn everything then it's all about the grind. You can't get record overnight, you need to put in a lot of attempts. When I first started I had times of over eleven minutes. It took me about a year and a half before I got world record in my category, so patience is definitely required.

BOSS RUSH

What kind of hero would Mario be if he didn't bring down a few behemoths on his travels? Here's a rogue's gallery of the miscreants he comes up against in Super Mario World

REZNOR

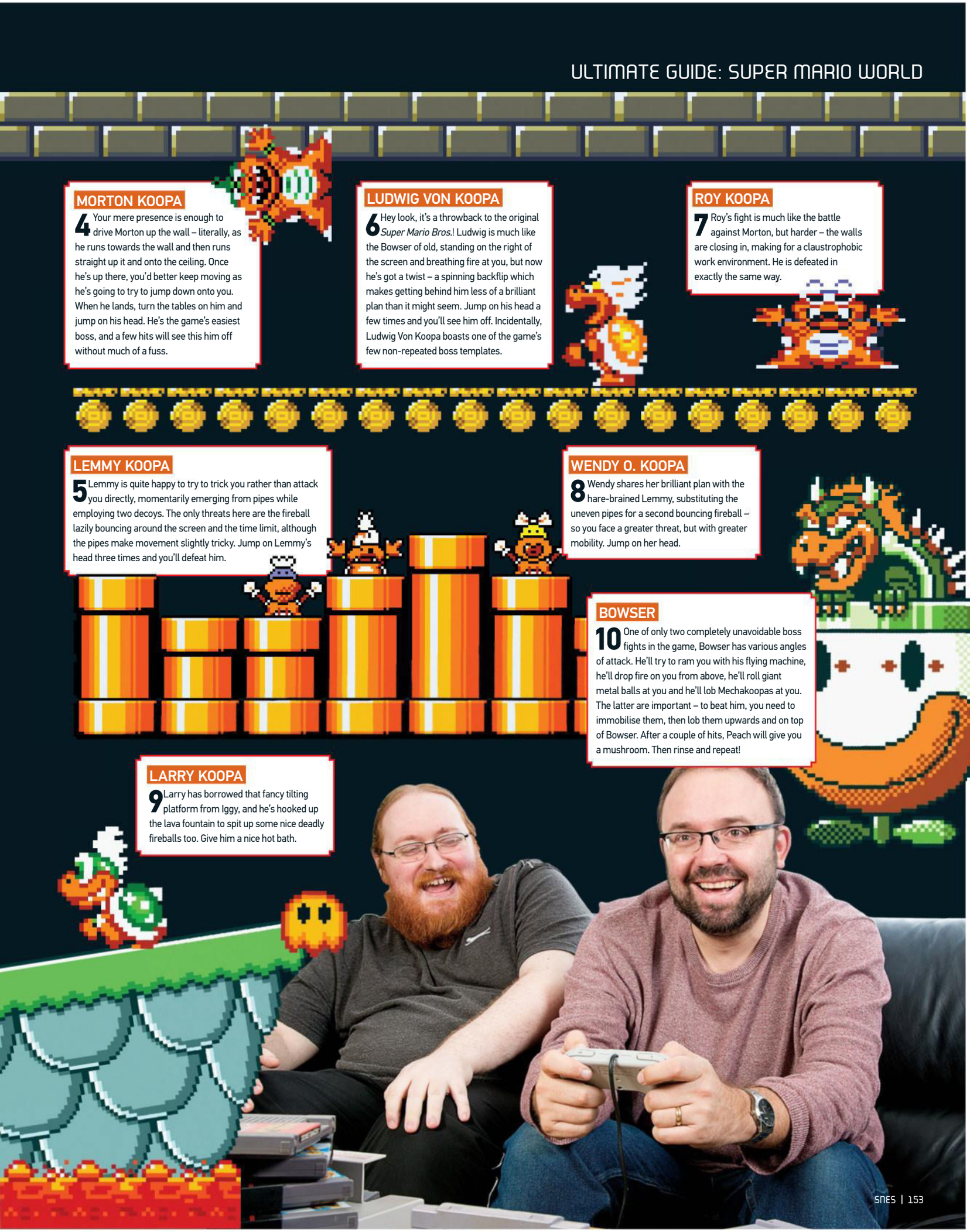
1 This quartet of fire-breathing triceratops stands atop a set of rotating platforms. You'll need to bump them from underneath, but watch out! Once you've knocked a couple of them from their platforms, the ground beneath you will start to give way. If you can't take out the remaining beasts, you'll need to hitch a ride on their carousel in order to finish them off. Oh, and if you were wondering, Reznor *is* named after the Nine Inch Nails frontman, Trent Reznor.

BIG BOO

2 Mario spends most of his time running away from these ghostly baddies, but the Big Boo resident in Donut Secret House is an aggressive sort. Unlike his compatriots elsewhere, he's capable of disappearing at will and is accompanied by a couple of regular Boos. You'll need to pick up Grab Blocks from below and throw them upwards at Big Boo, but they'll only hit when he turns visible. Three hits should be enough to see him off for good.

IGGY KOOPA

3 After battling your way through Iggy's castle, you'll encounter him atop a tilting platform, floating in a sea of lava. What follows is a deadly sumo contest, as you try to push him into the molten rock while he tries to toast you with fireballs. When you jump on him, he'll always slide downwards – so ideally, you want to time your hits for when he's close to the edge and it's tilting down. Fire Mario makes this fight a walkover, incidentally.



MORTON KOOPA

4 Your mere presence is enough to drive Morton up the wall – literally, as he runs towards the wall and then runs straight up it and onto the ceiling. Once he's up there, you'd better keep moving as he's going to try to jump down onto you. When he lands, turn the tables on him and jump on his head. He's the game's easiest boss, and a few hits will see this him off without much of a fuss.

LUDWIG VON KOOPA

6 Hey look, it's a throwback to the original *Super Mario Bros.*! Ludwig is much like the Bowser of old, standing on the right of the screen and breathing fire at you, but now he's got a twist – a spinning backflip which makes getting behind him less of a brilliant plan than it might seem. Jump on his head a few times and you'll see him off. Incidentally, Ludwig Von Koopa boasts one of the game's few non-repeated boss templates.

ROY KOOPA

7 Roy's fight is much like the battle against Morton, but harder – the walls are closing in, making for a claustrophobic work environment. He is defeated in exactly the same way.

LEMMY KOOPA

5 Lemmy is quite happy to try to trick you rather than attack you directly, momentarily emerging from pipes while employing two decoys. The only threats here are the fireball lazily bouncing around the screen and the time limit, although the pipes make movement slightly tricky. Jump on Lemmy's head three times and you'll defeat him.

WENDY O. KOOPA

8 Wendy shares her brilliant plan with the hare-brained Lemmy, substituting the uneven pipes for a second bouncing fireball – so you face a greater threat, but with greater mobility. Jump on her head.

BOWSER

10 One of only two completely unavoidable boss fights in the game, Bowser has various angles of attack. He'll try to ram you with his flying machine, he'll drop fire on you from above, he'll roll giant metal balls at you and he'll lob Mechakoopas at you. The latter are important – to beat him, you need to immobilise them, then lob them upwards and on top of Bowser. After a couple of hits, Peach will give you a mushroom. Then rinse and repeat!

LARRY KOOPA

9 Larry has borrowed that fancy tilting platform from Iggy, and he's hooked up the lava fountain to spit up some nice deadly fireballs too. Give him a nice hot bath.

Super Turrican

» **PLATFORM:** SNES » **DEVELOPER:** FACTOR 5 » **RELEASED:** 1993

t wasn't always easy seeing your home computer favourites converted to consoles in the Nineties. Some conversions were just plain bad, and even the best ones tended to miss certain bits – *Speedball 2* might have played well on the Mega Drive, but the lack of "ice cream!" shouts left Amiga owners feeling that something was missing. *Super Turrican*, however, was a rarer beast. Not content with simply porting an existing game to the SNES, the team gathered the best elements of the series so far.

When *Turrican* veterans reached the first boss and a familiar iron fist hovered into view, those worries flared up again. Surely this tiny thing wasn't the best the developers could do? As it quickly transpired, it wasn't. The fist scaled to fill most of the screen, before shrinking down to a regular size and commencing attack. While its patterns were standard fare, the sight of the giant fist rotating to punch the ground was all the proof you needed that Factor 5 had taken good care of *Turrican* – and taken advantage of the host hardware.

BIO

When Factor 5 took on the daunting job of bringing Manfred Trenz's masterwork to the SNES, it approached the project as a kind of greatest hits compilation. *Super Turrican* brought together level themes from the first two games in the series while adding a couple of new ones of its own. The game also included a new freeze beam attack which replaced the staple lightning whip and was capable of halting enemies temporarily. Factor 5 would go on to develop *Super Turrican 2*, which would become the last of the official *Turrican* games as later efforts fell by the wayside.

MORE CLASSIC SUPER TURRICAN MOMENTS

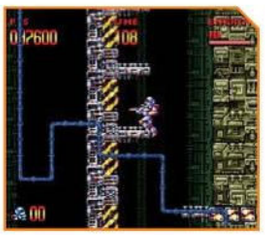
Rock Hard

When the screen locks in place and stone rain begins to fall, it's time to demonstrate your agility. Not only does the assault follow you, but the rocks split into two as they land, widening the potential hit area. The shower might only last 20 seconds, but it's hard to get through without taking a hit – we'd advise rolling as much as you can.

Playing The Angles

While the reflector shot isn't new, the carnage it can cause is always thrilling. With the right combination of positioning and geometry, you can hit any point on the screen, enabling you to take out dangerous enemies from positions of safety. But as satisfying as that is, it's more fun to indiscriminately fill the screen with bullets and watch things blow up.

Crush Hour



No, that's not a claustrophobic delusion – the walls really are closing in on you. It's a race against time as you hop from platform to platform, with diamonds placed tantalisingly on the central footholds to lure you from the safe routes. Eventually though, you'll be hopping up one or the other as it's impossible to escape with much time to spare.

Heart Of The Alien

The alien setting of the final stages is clearly inspired by the work of HR Giger and is oozing with details, such as the pulsating background and salivating aliens. But it's the horror of the biomechanical train that lingers in the memory – you'll need to dodge barriers and shoot aliens, while watching out for fires and gaps between the carriages.

RPG Heaven:

THE GREATEST SNES RPGS OF ALL TIME

During the infamous 16-bit console wars, both the Mega Drive and the Super Nintendo had their strengths that attracted gamers. One such strength of the Super Nintendo was the sheer amount of high-quality role-playing games available for it. Here we take a look at some of the best and most celebrated titles on Nintendo's machine

Terranigma

PUBLISHER: ENIX (JP) NINTENDO (PAL) **DEVELOPER:** QUINTET **YEAR** 1995

Terranigma is something of an oddity in the Super Nintendo RPG library. It was first released in 1995 in Japan under the title *Tenchi Sozo*, which translates as 'The Creation of Heaven and Earth'. A year later it was localised by Nintendo for the PAL markets but somehow never saw a release in America. This was extremely rare as most SNES RPGs made the trip to the US first and only a handful ever made it to PAL territories, a fact that explains why *Terranigma* now commands very high prices when bought online.

Terranigma is an action RPG that tells the story of Ark and his quest to resurrect life on Earth. It uses a top-down view and a fairly simple, but quite deep, real-time combat system. Ark has plenty of abilities such as dashing, jumping, sliding, guarding and an unusual magic system. For example, you must find Magirocks, which are taken to the magic shop to be turned into consumable spells. Once used, the spells turn back into Magirock and can be taken to the shop again. The game moves at quite a pace, even for an action-based RPG. Ark is instantly controllable and responds to commands on a whim, making him a joy to control.

The meat of *Terranigma* involves the resurrection of Earth. Once you complete the first five towers at the start of the game, the continents of the world are restored and Ark travels to the mainland in order to kick-start life. Your first task is to revive the plant life to enable nature to begin its journey. Ark can converse with the plants and they will guide you to revive the animals and then eventually mankind. This is predominantly achieved by travelling to various parts of the world to complete dungeons, gain items and trigger the multitude of story events.

The reason *Terranigma* is so good, though, is down to expert execution of various elements by developers Quintet. It manages to tell a wonderfully moving story and mix in plenty of original elements within the genre. For example, once you revive mankind, you are tasked with building the economies of the continents by helping residents make discoveries and then introducing them to different cultures.

The plot is quite unique because you play a large portion of the game with no real enemy. Normally in RPGs there is a defining evil from the very beginning of the game, but not so with *Terranigma*, which unravels with a level of skill not seen in many console games of the time. It's filled with deception, regret, love, religion and science and told with excellent pacing.

Terranigma also features superb graphics that vary from dank, desolate landscapes to vibrant jungles. The animation is excellent, character designs are attractive and the boss fights are impressive. The music is also superb, one of the best soundtracks of the generation for sure.

We're praying the game gets a Virtual Console release so it can be enjoyed by those who missed it the first time around. This is probably the most anticipated game on the service now *Earthbound* has been released. *Terranigma* is an all-time classic that despite commanding high prices is worth a place in any SNES owner's collection.

Soul Blazer

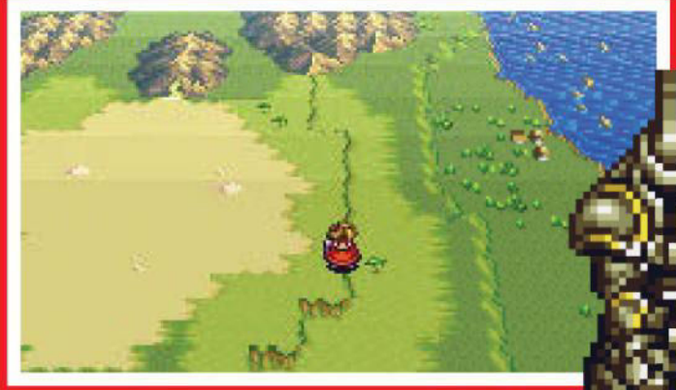
PUBLISHER: ENIX **DEVELOPER:** QUINTET **YEAR:** 1992

Seen as the first part of an unofficial trilogy that features both *Illusion of Time* and *Terranigma*, *Soul Blazer* is an action RPG based around the theme of resurrection. Essentially a dungeon-crawler, the player is tasked with freeing the souls of lost humans which, once released, rebuild the towns around them on your way to defeating the evil Deathtoll. The game tells a simple but poignant story that certainly has the power to draw the player in. Combat is also rather simple but somehow it all works like a dream because it's fast-paced, with plenty of enemies and some excellent boss battles. A forgotten gem you need to experience.

Mystic Quest Legend

PUBLISHER: SQUARE (US/JP) NINTENDO (PAL) **DEVELOPER:** SQUARE **YEAR:** 1992

Developed by Square and aimed as an entry-level RPG, *Mystic Quest Legend* was notable for being the first *Final Fantasy*-themed game released in the PAL regions, although it was a spin-off rather than actual canon. Despite being dramatically cut down in the overall gameplay department, *Mystic Quest Legend* is absorbing and enjoyable mainly thanks to its fun battle system and some fantastic music. There are no random battles here, as enemies are onscreen and a battle starts when you touch them. The game is also littered with optional battle arenas for levelling. With plenty of items, weapons and enemies, it's a simple but enjoyable experience.



Breath of Fire II

PUBLISHER: CAPCOM (NA/JP) LAGUNA (EU) **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE **YEAR:** 1994

Superior in almost every way to its predecessor, Capcom's *Breath of Fire II* is another high-quality RPG for the Super Nintendo. The majority of the game is viewed from a traditional top-down perspective, but battles are viewed from a visually superb isometric viewpoint that features fantastic sprites and glorious special effects. Combat is turn-based and does feature random battles, but the pace of battles remains fast enough to avoid frustration. Centring around now series-staple characters Ryu and Nina, Ryu has the ability to transform into a dragon, which is one of the most interesting parts of the game. The recurring characters, much like *The Legend of Zelda*'s, are descendants of previous characters and not the same ones. Despite a sluggish start and occasionally iffy translation, *Breath of Fire II* picks up pace to evolve into a truly great RPG.

Front Mission

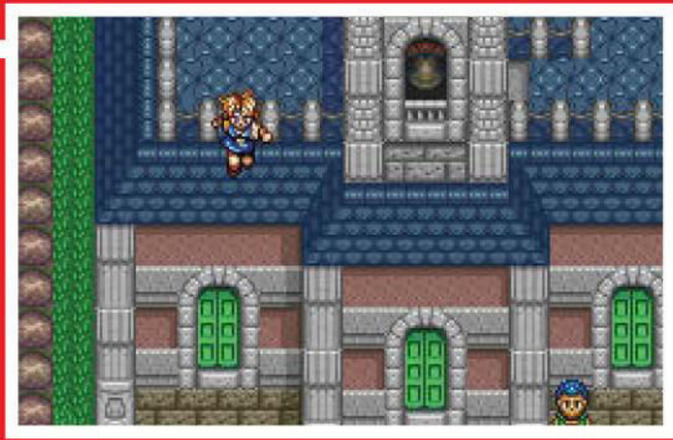
PUBLISHER: SQUARE **DEVELOPER:** G-CRAFT **YEAR:** 1995

Released only in Japan in 1995, *Front Mission* still managed to gain a cult following in the West and was finally released in an officially translated form in North America during 2007 on Nintendo's DS. The game is an RPG of a tactical nature with linear game progression and a deep, entertaining plot. Set in 2090 and revolving around the colonisation of a fictitious island in the Pacific Ocean, *Front Mission* tells a tale that's as intriguing as it is fresh. The battle system is mostly in the usual tactical mould, however when attacks are performed, the game cuts to a close-up of the target in question for some spectacular visual effects. Depth comes from the customisation on offer. The majority of units are Wanzers, giant walking tanks that have four unique health bars: one each for the legs, left arm, right arm and body. Each is upgradable as the game progresses. It's different, but highly recommended.

Illusion of Time

PUBLISHER: ENIX (JP) NINTENDO (WORLD) **DEVELOPER:** QUINTET **YEAR** 1993

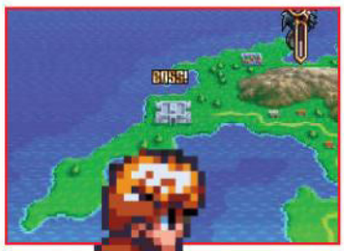
Despite being another action RPG, *Illusion of Time* is quite a different beast to many similar games. Eschewing many staples of the genre, such as experience points, currency or equipment, *Illusion of Time* centres around Will and his alter egos in a plot to uncover the secrets of the Tower of Babel. Like *Terranigma*, the world is based loosely on Earth and features many locations such as The Great Wall of China and the Egyptian Pyramids. After adventuring to the Tower of Babel with his father, disaster strikes and Will returns to the village alone with no recollections of what happened. The game begins in earnest when Will gains the ability to make his first of two transformations. Will does have the ability to increase his power by collecting jewels dropped when clearing a room of enemies, but this unique skill can only be done once per room. It all makes for a highly novel adventure.



Ogre Battle

PUBLISHER: ENIX **DEVELOPER:** QUEST **YEAR:** 1995

One of the most important things about *Ogre Battle* is that it launched one of the most successful careers in Japan, namely Yasumi Matsuno, who went on to create several mega hits, two of which scored 40/40 in *Famitsu*. The other most important thing is that it's also an excellent strategy RPG, although it plays out more like an RTS title, such as *Command & Conquer*, upon entering battle. *Ogre Battle* has plenty of depth when preparing for combat. It features a tarot card system that can be used to add certain effects at certain times. There's an alignment system that's a play on the good/evil theme, a day/night cycle that affects how certain classes or cards react in fights and more than 70 different classes of units to control. Set to a gripping, politically motivated plot and boasting some lovely visuals, *Ogre Battle* comes highly recommended to those that like a good challenge.

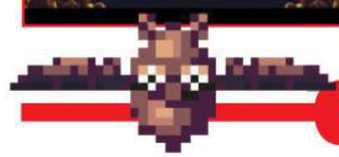


Secret of Evermore

PUBLISHER: SQUARE **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE **YEAR:** 1995

In 1995, Super Nintendo fans were hugely anticipating *Secret of Mana 2*. Instead they got *Secret of Evermore*, a game developed by a team in America that Square had set up solely for creating it.

After the initial disappointment that *Mana 2* was not coming, *Secret of Evermore* turned out to be an excellent take on the *Mana* gameplay system, but with a contemporary setting in America. The plot is based around time travel and involves an unnamed boy and his dog while featuring plenty of clever B-movie references. What we love about *Secret of Evermore* is that it is packed with interesting ideas. Each region has a different currency, which can be converted at certain vendors and as you travel to each time zone, your dog takes on a different form relevant to that zone. Magic is based around alchemy, so you have to create your spells before you can cast them. The dog can also be used to sniff out ingredients for you, delivering another nice touch in a game that's littered with them.



Chrono Trigger

PUBLISHER: SQUARESOFT **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE **YEAR:** 1995

This epic RPG was developed by Squaresoft and featured a creative team that had fans of the genre salivating. Hironobu Sakaguchi, the creator of *Final Fantasy*; Yuji Horii, creator of long-term rival Enix's *Dragon Quest*; and Akira Toriyama, artist of *Dragon Ball Z* and *Dragon Quest*, were all lead designers on the project. This led to *Chrono Trigger* being massively anticipated by Japanese and Western RPG fans alike. We're pleased to say this masterpiece delivered on all counts.

The first thing you notice about the game is the very *Dragon Ball Z*-style art. It's striking compared to the sombre styling of *Final Fantasy VI*. Characters have wild spiky hair, colours are vivid but retain a realistic style that sits somewhere between other popular Squaresoft games.

On the surface, *Chrono Trigger* seems like any other Japanese RPG, however it contains several important innovations that set it apart from them. The first of these is the complete elimination of random battles and the separate battle plain. Enemies are visible at all times, so once you come into contact with one the battle begins and plays out on the same screen, rather than cutting to a battle map. This helps to not only avoid the frustration of random encounters, but also allows the level of immersion into the world to remain high without the jarring change of scenery.

The next major innovation is its many multiple endings. *Chrono Trigger* features no fewer than 14 different endings to discover, many of them accessible through the excellent new Game Plus feature that's now standard on many of today's games.

Throughout the game, lead character Crono travels across various time zones ranging from 65000000BC to 2300AD. This gave the developers a real freedom to create very diverse and interesting locations, ranging from the dinosaur-infested forests of the past to the malfunctioning domes of the future. The story itself is excellent with intriguing enemies, genuine heart-felt moments and a great translation that still stands up today.

Chrono Trigger is a masterpiece of game design and it hasn't aged at all since it was first released in 1995. Anyone with even a passing interest in the genre should check it out immediately. Just be aware that it's a little on the pricey side.

Super Mario RPG

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO **DEVELOPER:** SQUARESOFT **YEAR:** 1996 (NTSC)

Super Mario RPG is a landmark title in many different ways. On the one hand it was a stunning collaboration between Nintendo and Square, but on the other it was one of the last Square-developed titles on a Nintendo platform for some time.

The first thing new players should do when starting the game is to watch the brilliant Attract mode. This gives players a great idea of the sheer amount of superb ideas that have been crammed into it. Featuring a mix of action platforming and turn-based combat, *Super Mario RPG* is a fast-paced, absorbing adventure, which is incredibly accessible to even the most novice of RPG fans. Visually the game looks 32-bit, as it features similar rendering techniques to *Donkey Kong Country* and a distinctive 3D isometric viewpoint. The music is suitably twee but never annoying as expected from now industry legend, Yoko Shimomura.

If there is one thing that *Super Mario RPG* does so well, it's that it highlights Squaresoft in its prime and how big a deal it was when Nintendo finally lost the talented developer to Sony.

Shadowrun

PUBLISHER: DATA EAST/LASER BEAM **DEVELOPER:** BEAM SOFTWARE **YEAR:** 1993

One of the most unique titles on the SNES, *Shadowrun* combines action RPG-style gameplay with elements of the point-and-click genre that was popular on computers at the time. Set in the not-too-distant future, your task as Jake Armitage is to track down your missing identity and to find the person that wants you dead. The cyberpunk setting feels very fresh on the console, the isometric visual style is nicely detailed, while the music is suitably matched and well composed. Piecing together the plot is a hugely compelling experience, while talking to NPCs opens up new conversational opportunities to help you through this more adult of Super Nintendo RPGs.

Secret of Mana

PUBLISHER: SQUARESOFT **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE **YEAR:** 1993

Secret of Mana is a hugely popular action RPG and for good reason. Squaresoft's game features sumptuous graphics, incredible music and a stunning three-player mode that instantly made it stand apart from other RPGs of the time.

First released in 1993 and a follow up to the Game Boy classic *Mystic Quest*, *Secret of Mana* captivated audiences from the get go. It tells a simple story of a young boy who discovers a mysterious sword that he pulls, Arthur-like, from solid stone. It turns out that Mana, the lifeblood of the land, is being drained by the enemy in order to control the world; leaving the hero to energise the failing Mana Sword and hopefully restore balance to the land.

Visually, *Secret of Mana* is stunning, with some of the best visuals to be seen on a 16-bit system at the time. Locations are diverse, ranging from desert plateaus, bustling villages and evergreen forests, with Upperland being a standout location, as you literally walk through the forest as the seasons change from one to the next. Sonically the game doesn't disappoint either. The music in the opening sequence is still one of the most stunning in gaming, even today. Using sampled pipes, bass and various synthesised sounds among others, *Secret of Mana*'s soundtrack is diverse, often beautiful, yet dark and dramatic when it needs to be.

At its core, it's an action RPG featuring character levels, weapon levels and magic levels. Eight weapons are available to the player, which can be upgraded throughout the adventure. Magic too comes in eight forms and covers a variety of traditional elements. The biggest aspect of the game, however, is that it can be played by up to three players using a multi-tap. This is something that has rarely been done since, which is disappointing, as it completely takes a usually solitary experience and livens it up immensely. On the downside, when in single player the AI can cause a few minor issues, although its behaviour can be adjusted. Ultimately though, *Secret of Mana* is another classic RPG for Nintendo's 16-bit console.

Earthbound

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO **DEVELOPER:** HAL/APE **RELEASE:** 1994

Earthbound is certainly one of the most interesting titles for the Super Nintendo. On the surface it appears to be fairly simplistic, but the more time spent with it, the more you realise just how unique it actually is. In fact, there's nothing else quite like it on any 16-bit console.

Set in modern-day America, *Earthbound* is a Japanese take on the American lifestyle with often-hilarious results. It tells the story of Ness and his friends and their adventure to defeat the evil Giygas, the leader of an alien invasion on planet Earth.

The graphics have a simple but extremely charming style to them, coming across like a cute Saturday morning cartoon. The world itself is presented in a pseudo-3D style and is completely seamless from one location to the next – very uncommon within the actual genre. The fighting system is generally standard, but the actions of characters during fights will leave players grinning from ear to ear, as they're so entertaining. Despite a fairly slow pace, *Earthbound* is an incredibly charming and wacky game that deserves to be played through. It's now available on Virtual Console, meaning you'll no longer have to shell out over £500 for the original game.

Final Fantasy VI

PUBLISHER: SQUARESOFT **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE **RELEASE:** 1994

Leading up to the release of *Final Fantasy VI*, Squaresoft was building a massive reputation in the RPG scene. Enix, developer of *Dragon Quest*, was the most popular in Japan at the time, but *Final Fantasy VI* certainly marked a shift in Square's favour. It was simply an astonishing package, which was wonderfully ambitious with its storytelling and dark themes. Couple this with glorious visuals and a critically acclaimed soundtrack and it's no wonder *Final Fantasy VI* is often heralded as the best game in the series by American and Japanese audiences.

The plot is quite dark and at times even depressing, as you work your way through the many areas of the game, meeting hundreds of interesting characters along the way. The central character of the story is a young girl called Terra. When you first meet her she has been brainwashed by the evil empire and is being controlled in order to attack Espers (magical beings) and wipe them out. Once free of the empire, Terra goes on a journey of discovery to find out where she is from and rediscover her forgotten memories. Along the way some absolutely magnificent characters are met: Shadow the ninja with his trusty canine sidekick Interceptor; Edgar the King Of Figaro, who has an eye for the ladies; Ultros who is apparently octopus royalty; and Kefka, the antagonist of the game and none other than a court jester! Kefka aims to defeat the Espers to take control of the magic and indeed the world. It's the duty of the player to stop him. Along the way, themes of love, regret, isolation, desperation and many others are carefully explored. Squaresoft did an excellent job with such a deep plot and it still impresses today.

Plot aside, *Final Fantasy VI* plays out much like traditional Japanese RPG with active turn-based combat and plenty of random battles. With 14 playable characters and masses of customisation, it's an all-time classic that is climbing in price and desirability.

Seiken Densetsu 3

PUBLISHER: SQUARESOFT **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE **YEAR:** 1995

Despite never being released outside of Japan, *Seiken Densetsu 3* has built up a huge following over the years, with many fans that are still desperate for an official translation. There are many reasons for this, but the most obvious are its graphics, which are achingly beautiful and easily sit alongside some of the best 32-bit 2D RPGs.

Like its predecessor, *Secret of Mana*, *Seiken Densetsu 3* is an action RPG with deep combat and a multiplayer option, although it only supports two players. It's packed with many unique features, however, including a branching story arc, absolutely huge bosses and a day-and-night cycle with each day based on an element that affects magic as a result. *Seiken Densetsu 3* never made it to the West because of a few technical problems in the game's code, but it has been translated by fans and is fully playable in English, although sourcing a Japanese copy is still worth doing.

With its lush visuals, buckets of charm, humour, wonderful music, and world that meshed elements from platform, puzzle, shmup and RPG games, the West's first entry in the *Mystical Ninja* (aka *Ganbare Goemon*) series of games is one of the craziest platform games to appear on the Super Nintendo. Stuart Hunt puffs on his smoking pipe and inhales the madness of *The Legend Of The Mystical Ninja*.

THE LEGEND OF THE MYSTICAL NINJA

THE EVOLUTION OF GOEMON

MR GOEMON
Arcade, 1986
For his arcade debut, originally Goemon's look took cues from traditional Ukiyo-e paintings. The game was a quirky side-scrolling run-and-jump game that played similarly to the platform sections in *The Legend Of The Mystical Ninja*.

GANBARE GOEMON
Famicom, 1986
For Goemon's first console release, the Ukiyo-e look was dropped – though not in the game's box art – in favour of a more anime-looking cartoon sprite. We think the white parts in his eyes make him look a little angly, though.

GANBARE GOEMON 2
Famicom, 1989
The Famicom sequel, which was the first to introduce the co-op mode and Ebisumaru, opted to make Goemon look like a character in the comic strip *Peanuts*, with a change of hairstyle that he would keep in subsequent exploits.

LEGEND OF THE MYSTICAL NINJA
SNES, 1991
The added muscle of the Super Nintendo allowed Konami to breathe more personality into the character. This the first incarnation of Goemon with his blue-tinted hair and red and yellow outfit.

GANBARE GOEMON 2
SNES, 1993
The Goemon sprite in the SNES follow-up to the original didn't really deviate much from the original. The only notable difference is that the sprite looks more detailed, slightly chunkier and has spikier hair.

GANBARE GOEMON: SHIN SEDAI SHUUMEI
PlayStation, 2001
A series reboot of sorts, this PlayStation game reimagined the *Goemon* world by setting it in the future and going all *Dragon Ball* in the looks department.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

It has something for everyone

Easily the best aspect of *The Legend Of The Mystical Ninja* is the sheer amount of variety that Konami managed to cram in. Bursting at the seams with character and diversity, the second you boot the game you are greeted by wacky and humorous enemies and bosses, a world brimming with things to discover, and various little nods to other Konami franchises. You can't help but get immersed in the world. While the game can admittedly be a slow burn to begin with, this is largely due to the game throwing so much at you so quickly. Once you settle into the game you can't help but be captivated.

A game of two halves

The basic gameplay of *Mystical Ninja* is divided into two sections. The first section of each stage is reminiscent of titles like *Jack The Nipper* and *Everyone's A Wally*, and takes its cues from the NES series. Set inside various hamlets, full of quirky and often bizarre enemies, these sections show off the amount of effort that Konami put into the game. The second sections are more typical side-scrolling platformer bits, with tricky jump sequences, imaginative levels, and a large array of enemies and bosses to duff up. The contrast of the two styles works well to offer a platform game with far more character than its peers.

Kid Ying and Dr Yang

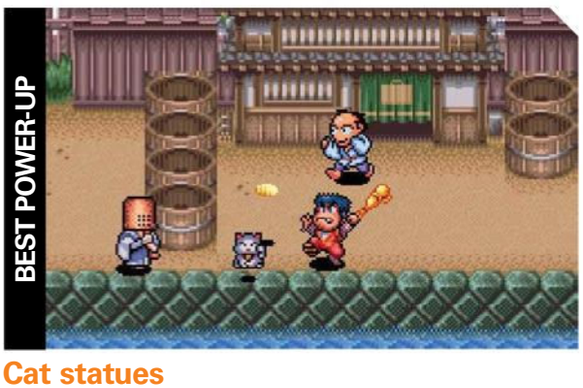
First introduced in *Ganbare Goemon 2* on the Famicom, one of the best elements of *Mystical Ninja* was the fact that two players could play through the game together as Goemon and his odd sidekick Ebisumaru, named Kid Ying and Dr Yang respectively in the West. Save for signature weapons, the differences between the characters are nominal, but the co-op mode does have its benefits. The characters can ride on each other's backs, allowing one to focus on attacking while the other moves. While this may sound a little awkward, it actually makes negotiating the trickier platform sections in the game a little bit easier.

Memories from a geisha

There are plenty of memorable end-level bosses in the game, so picking one wasn't easy. In the end, we went with this thing: a chubby samurai tag team that changes into a giant floating head that looks like Gordon Brown made up to look like a geisha girl. Admittedly, we picked this boss entirely for that reason. If you're looking for a more sensible motive from us then we also like the way that whenever you hit this thing it grows until it envelops the entire screen, like something from a Roald Dahl story. It makes your job hitting it easier, but avoiding getting smothered by its chilling smile is much harder.

More than you can shake a pipe at

One of the best elements is the sheer amount of stuff there is to see and do in the town sections. You can place a bet on a horse race, partake in a quiz show, explore some cavernous 3D mazes, or even play some mini-games, including a one-level version of Konami's classic shooter *Gradius*. While rarely necessary to actually go exploring inside the towns – in all of the stages bar one, if we remember rightly, you can dash through these sections to reach the platform bits – these asides are a great way to replenish health, stock up on lives or simply take a much-needed break from the action.



Cat statues

Look out for the grey kitten statues that are randomly dropped by enemies, as they power up your weapons. Ying bonks his enemies on the noggin using a smoking pipe, while Yang uses his flute. The first phase will extend them, offering you a better reach, and the second will transform them into a yo-yo for Ying and a party blower for Yang. As well as this, each character can also use the money they find as a projectile weapon – a neat feature – and several different judo moves too, ranging from temporary flight and an attack that smites multiple enemies on screen, to a neat animal companion to ride on.

What the press said… ages ago

Mean Machines

"The Japanese excel at producing cutesy-style games, and *Goemon* must rank as one of the finest examples yet, with brilliant sprites and varied backdrops."

What we think

Mystical Ninja hasn't lost any of its charm. Actually, we found returning to the game as enjoyable an experience as when we first discovered it many moons ago. The graphics still look great, the music is still toe-tappingly catchy and the humour is still funny. A timeless classic, then.

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **RELEASED:** 1991
- **GENRE:** PLATFORM

SNES Controller

» **PLATFORM:** SNES » **RELEASED:** 1990 » **COST:** £7 (UNBOXED) / £10 (BOXED)

Nintendo started the trend towards joypads with the release of the Famicom, and the design for its follow-up proved similarly influential. When the Super Famicom launched In Japan in 1990, it would introduce a variety of now-standard features to the console joypad. The first of these was the addition of shoulder buttons – two long buttons mounted on the top edge of the pad, rather than its face. The L and R buttons were designed for your index fingers to rest on while holding the pad, enabling quick access. The other change was the face button layout – four buttons in a diamond formation, with X and Y joining A and B. The pad also followed in the footsteps of Sega's Mega Drive controller by featuring a rounded body, showing a concession to ergonomics that hadn't been present in the Famicom and NES pads.

Shoulder buttons quickly caught on, becoming a standard feature of console joypads by the 32-bit generation, but the diamond formation of four face buttons took a little longer to become standard as companies (including Nintendo) experimented with different six-button layouts. However, all major consoles and dedicated gaming handhelds use it now – and all owe a debt to the SNES pad. ✱

EDITOR'S CHOICE F-Zero

This futuristic racing game made a perfect case for the SNES pad's layout right from the launch of the system, by offering a control scheme that would be impossible on any other control pad available at the time. As well as the standard acceleration, brake and steering controls expected of a racing game, *F-Zero* added a turbo function on the A button. However, the best addition was the ability to lean your craft with the shoulder buttons, intuitively using L and R buttons to add extra cornering power or provide lateral movement in the appropriate direction.

SNES controller fact

■ Rather than creating its own controller connection standard for the CPS Changer arcade system, Capcom opted to include SNES control ports. Of course, the company hoped you'd use its controllers rather than standard SNES pads...

why you must PLAY

ACTRAISER

» **PUBLISHER:** ENIX CORPORATION
» **DEVELOPER:** QUINTET
» **RELEASED:** 1990
» **GENRE:** PLATFORMER/GOD SIM

QUINTET'S 16-BIT CLASSIC REMAINS ONE OF THE MOST INNOVATIVE GAMES ON THE SNES, DELIVERING A MIX OF ACTION AND SIMULATION THAT NO OTHER GAME HAS EVER BEEN ABLE TO MATCH. FAMED FOR ITS FANTASTIC AUDIO SCORE AND SUPERB LOOKING VISUALS, THERE'S NEVER BEEN A BETTER TIME TO REVISIT THIS EVERGREEN FAVOURITE. JUST DON'T TALK TOO MUCH ABOUT THE SEQUEL...

ONE SEQUEL TOO MANY

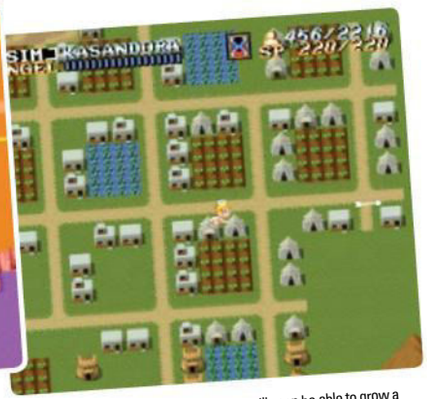
Considering how perfectly crafted the original game was you'd have expected a sequel to be even better. Sadly, *ActRaiser 2* was a huge fall from grace that wasn't a patch on its inspiration. Granted, Yuzo Koshiro's score was as good as ever and the graphics were to die for, but somewhere along the line Quintet had forgotten to include the all-important gameplay. Worst yet, the sim sections had been abandoned, meaning that *ActRaiser 2* was no different to many of the other scrolling fighters that were available. With its horrifically clunky controls, the insane difficulty and poor level design, *ActRaiser 2* is perfect proof that sometimes you can only bottle lightning once.

Games that straddle genres are always a difficult sell, so it comes as no surprise that Quintet's outrageously polished *ActRaiser* didn't find the fanbase it deserved when first released. Part scrolling slash-'em-up, part God sim, *ActRaiser* was like nothing else around upon its arrival in 1990, and three years later, when it appeared on UK shelves, it still managed to stand apart from virtually every other available SNES game.

Maybe it was the fact that it arrived three years too late, (although aesthetically it still stood head and shoulders over a great many other SNES offerings), or perhaps the mish-mash playing styles were too conflicting. Nevertheless, despite receiving praise in numerous magazines at the time, *ActRaiser* didn't exactly set the charts alight – a shame as it's a wonderfully unique experience that offers plenty of outstanding gaming moments for those willing to track it down.

It's never easy being a God and the being you control in *ActRaiser* is having a particularly hard time with his newfound divinity. The people of the world he oversees are crying out for spiritual guidance and need protecting from the many vicious monsters that your nemesis Tanzra has unleashed into the world. Only when all six realms have been secured will Tanzra's resting place finally be revealed and give you a chance of stopping your monstrous

» Use the power of sunshine to clear swamps and make them habitable for your followers.



» Keep building up your lands and you'll soon be able to grow a selection of different crops. Alright... just two.

» The Sky Palace is the home of your god and allows you to travel across the Mode 7 world.

foe once and for all, but before that happens, you've got plenty of work to occupy your divine hands.

Fortunately, you're aided throughout your adventure by an affable angel, who not only fills in the role as personal advisor, but also acts as a controllable avatar for when you're let loose in *ActRaiser*'s sim sections. Full of useful information, he'll constantly give you subtle hints to ease your progress through the game and acts as a go-between for you and your followers. He's a charming creation and by the end of the game you'll have built up quite a rapport with the little fella. It's this interaction between yourself and the game that proves to be one of *ActRaiser*'s in strengths. One section sees you rescuing a young boy called Teddy, only to be told by your angel companion at *ActRaiser*'s poignant finale that the young lad had died earlier, but you weren't told for fear of getting upset. Quintet's opus sucks you in, and despite not having a single cutscene *ActRaiser* boasts a cinematic quality that few other 16-bit titles can muster. Indeed, everything about Quintet's game is on an impressively grand scale, and as it deftly switches between genres, like a great rollercoaster, you can't help but be taken along for the ride. Well we say rollercoaster, but *ActRaiser* is more akin to a log-flume. The sim sections are equivalent to the slow steady climb to the ride's zenith while *ActRaiser*'s outrageously good battles are comparable to the flume's final dizzying drop. And like all good rides, as soon as you've finished it, you'll be instantly returning for another go.

Ah yes, the action sections. Granted, the animation might not impress like it once did, and practically every boss you face is deceptively easy to defeat, but goddamn, they're still enjoyable to play through. Crammed with amazing attention to detail, the countryside you hack and slash your way through would be the perfect place to stop for a picnic if it wasn't for the many monsters you continually face. From the lush verdant forests of Fillmore, to the icy wastes of Northwall, *ActRaiser*'s environments are breathtaking in scope and many of them (Aitos and Northwall in particular) can still draw the odd gasp of wonderment. It wasn't just the locations that had been given plenty of care and attention, as the many opponents you face off against (particularly some of the huge bosses) add to *ActRaiser*'s graphical grandeur. Animation may look rather basic

KNOW YOUR FOE

Just a few of the enemies you should look out for

BAT

Carries off followers whenever it gets the chance. Can be killed with a single shot from your angel's bow.

DRAGON

Uses lightning to destroy houses. Can be killed with two hits from your angel's bow.

IMP

Destroys crops. Can be killed with three hits from your angel's bow.

SKULLS

Creates devastating earthquakes that cripple villages. Can be killed with seven shots from your angel's bow.

"EVERYTHING ABOUT QUINTET'S GAME IS ON AN IMPRESSIVELY GRAND SCALE"

MAGICAL MOMENT

The game's not even started yet, but look how amazing the title screen is. Using the SNES's nifty Mode 7 the *ActRaiser* logo swirls around the screen to some truly excellent music. This is the stuff dreams are made of. Look at it swirling around, wooo, it's actually quite hypnotic. We could sit and watch this for hours, just losing ourselves in its silvery world.

» Your poor followers are suffering from the plague. Surely one of the neighbouring countries has a cure?

why you must PLAY

» The landscape may look gorgeous but it's filled with all sorts of dangers.

SIM ANGEL FILLMORE
SP 504/0543 040/080
Use Offering
Strength of Angel
The power of the Angel's arrow seems to have increased.

» *ActRaiser*'s menu is simple in looks but wonderfully intuitive to operate.

» *ActRaiser*'s many scrolling levels still stand up today and look absolutely beautiful.

"ACTRAISER STILL RETAINS A REFRESHING UNIQUENESS THAT ENABLES IT TO STAND PROUD AGAINST MANY OF THE SNES'S BETTER-KNOWN TITLES"

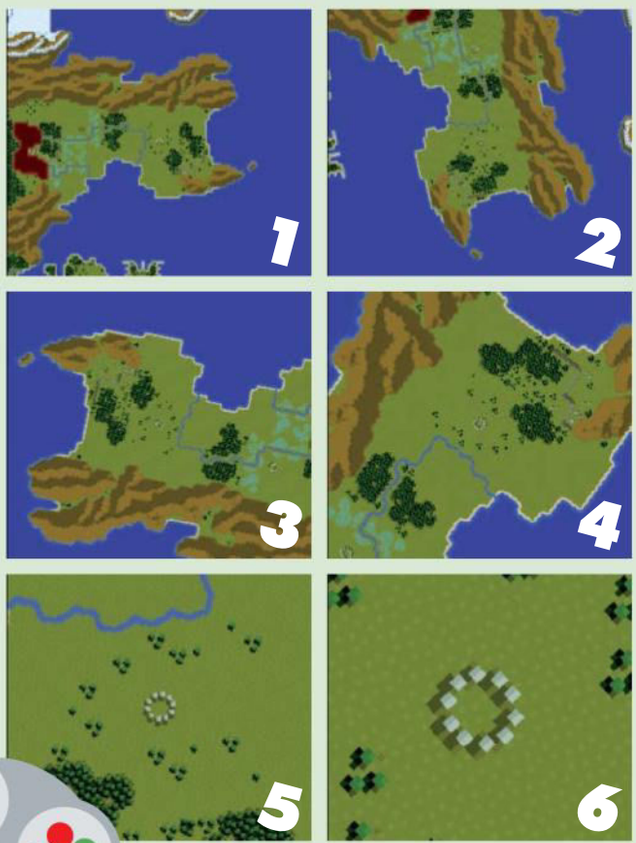
nowadays, but the sprite design featured throughout remains as strong as ever. Cute shambling apes, giant Ent-styled trees, mischievous looking gnomes and vicious lizard men may be little more than cannon-fodder for the impressively armoured knight you control, but that didn't mean that Quintet hadn't showed them any less attention than *ActRaiser*'s mayors. Axe-throwing minotaurs, flame-spewing manticores, viciously fast water dragons, heavily-armoured centaurs, *ActRaiser*'s bosses were very impressive and few will forget the last stage that sees you fighting several of them in quick succession before finally facing Tanra himself.

In truth though, *ActRaiser*'s visuals tell only half the story, as it was its stunning soundtrack that truly drove home the game's cinematic qualities. Wonderfully bombastic in its scale and featuring a stunning range of orchestral tunes, *ActRaiser* is an aural delight and its selection of beautifully varied tunes never fails to impress. From the 20th Century Fox-styled opening that accompanies the swirling title screen, to the heartrending ending (all flutes and pipes), *ActRaiser*'s music is as integral to the game as its actual gameplay and it's impossible to think of having one without the other. Of course, when you discover that *ActRaiser*'s rousing score is by Yuzo Koshiro, the legendary musician behind the likes of *Shenmue*, *Revenge Of Shinobi* and the excellent *Streets Of Rage* trilogy, everything begins to make perfect sense.

So with its stirring music, beautiful visuals and cleverly juxtaposed genres *ActRaiser* sounds very nearly perfect, and it very nearly is. The only small downside to this beautifully crafted creation is that it's a little too easy, although in another way that can actually be seen as a bonus, as it will enable you to uncover *ActRaiser*'s secrets over one long weekend. With today's RPGs being bogged down with lengthy cutscenes and monotonous levelling up, finding a game like *ActRaiser* that can be completed so quickly is truly refreshing. The relative speed with which you can play through *ActRaiser* must be levelled at its six sim sections, as they are extremely simplistic in their execution and require you to do little more than level the surrounding countryside with a selection of different powers (lightning, rain, or later earthquakes) while laying the ground work for your followers to build on and shoot any nearby monsters. While your subjects continually pester you with requests, most

REMEMBER WHEN?

Some of the most jaw-dropping moments in *ActRaiser* occur when you're about to enter a new battle. Beginning high above the Mode 7 landscape you zoom towards the ground, which continually rotates on your approach. As your descent continues, a slowly building orchestra sounds off in the background. It's a breathtaking scene that still impresses today.



» When things aren't going well your followers will soon give you a sign.

» Now this is tricky. The screen continually scrolls forward, so you really need to be on your guard.

LOCATION, LOCATION

ActRaiser's environments are many and varied…

FILLMORE

Your quest begins in the delightful land of Fillmore. While most of its countryside consists of rolling pastures there are a fair few trees that make building roads difficult. A quick blast of lightning soon solves this particular problem though.

BLOODPOOL

The swamp infested Bloodpool gets its name from the deep red of its largest lake. You discover that the large expanse of water is being poisoned by monsters, but how are you going to stop them and restore the lake to its former glory?

KASANDORA

Living in Kasandora appears impossible as it's filled with a huge expanse of inhospitable desert. Fortunately, you can summon up large quantities of rain to flush most of it away, meaning that your followers can soon rebuild new homes.

AITOS

The region of Aitos is similar to Kasandora in that it requires a lot of effort to enable your followers to live there. Use gusts of wind to keep their windmills turning and they will reward you with the wool they gather from the region's sheep.

MARAHNA

A humid jungle that requires plenty of lightning blasts to destroy the island's many trees. You'll also be required to create an earthquake later in the game, so make sure you don't build too many homes near the targeted area…

NORTHWALL

The biggest problem you'll have at Northwall is that it's too cold for many of your villagers to work in. Surely one of your other countries has a way of keeping them warm… It also features one of the hardest stages in the game.

tasks require you to do little more than travel to an adjacent town and pick up an item that your current villagers are unable to create. Of course, with *ActRaiser* straddling two vastly different genres, neither of them were going to be as complex as a game that focused on a single playing style, so Quintet's linear approach can be somewhat justified. It also means that you can quickly race through the town building sections and return to the side-scrolling hack-fests – it should come as no surprise to learn that Quintet includes a "Professional Mode" that cuts out the sim building entirely and simply allows you to play all 12 of *ActRaiser*'s glorious levels.

Even after 23 years *ActRaiser* retains a refreshing uniqueness that enables it to stand proud against many of the SNES's better-known titles. The fact that many of you are unlikely to have played it the first time around should help make its discovery all the sweeter.

» The final showdown, but are you up for the task ahead?

BEASTLY BOSSES

Just a few of *ActRaiser*'s bosses and how to defeat them

CENTAUR KNIGHT

The first boss may be huge but he's easy to kill. Duck under his attack and then get in a quick counter hit. When he fires his lightning attack, run to the far right of the screen.

WIZARD

Stay at a distance to avoid his fire. When he lands on the bottom right, run over to score four hits on him. He'll turn into a werewolf, but just constantly hit him and he'll keel over.

ICE WYVERN

Wait for him to fire ice at you then run away from him. Eventually he'll come to a stop, so manoeuvre behind him to get in a few solid strikes. Rinse, lather, and repeat…

GOLDEN PHARAOH

His eyes will indicate when he drops down, so stay out of his way. Once he's landed you can hit him and all you have to do is jump over the laser he fires and repeat the process.

SUPER MARIO KART

BROOMY, BRM, BROOOOOOM!

- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **GENRE:** KART RACER
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SNES

HISTORY

Do you remember Mode 7 from back in the day? Anyone who owned a SNES should, since it was one of the hotter gaming buzz-phrases along with "16 mega-baps", "parallax groping" and "defibrillated joysticks." Well, depending on where you lived that is. The above examples I'm told were popular in Swedish SNES magazines of the time.

Mode 7 wowed us with pseudo-3D japery, but in reality it was little more than a massive flat image being rotated, panned and zoomed; close up the imagery became a deranged mass of blocky pixels – we can't even bring our eyes to look upon the original *Pilotwings* anymore, for fear of sullying our memories. But hark, oh fellow pad junkies, for there are some Mode 7 games which can still captivate despite their now archaic means of display.

The racing genre was well served by Mode 7, with two excellent examples. The first was *F-Zero*, a futuristic racer which focused on driving skill and straight-line racing, which is regarded as a classic. It was minimalist in design, uncluttered and refined, but it lacked a two-player mode. Two years later Nintendo released *Super Mario Kart*, the complete (though complimentary) antithesis to *F-Zero*; it was the other side to the racing coin and balanced things out nicely.

SMK featured more intense and frenetic racing; it had short-cuts, sudden speed-depleting crashes, wild wacky weapons, and a roster of Nintendo characters. It also kick-started the hyper-cute, super-deformed, karting-racer sub-genre, bringing it right into the masses' faces and making them love it. The one-player mode was excellent and provided a great challenge, either through the standard Grand Prix or Time Trial modes. But the real draw for the game was its two-player modes: Grand Prix co-op, standard racing, or the ultimate destroyer of friendships, BATTLE MODE! How can anyone claim to have been a SNES gamer if they'd never experienced this magical rite of passage? There's nothing quite like shooting a red shell into your best friend in Battle Course 2, and then grabbing a feather to jump into the nearby barriers thereby protecting yourself from their vengeful wrath.

1
00' 00" 57
x 3
x 05
8

2
00' 00" 59
x 3
7

Super Star Wars Trilogy

Even now, the Super Star Wars games remain the only movie trilogy to make it onto a single console. We spoke to director Kalani Streicher to discover the secrets of the epic platform saga

In the know

- **» PUBLISHER:** JVC/Nintendo
- **» DEVELOPER:** LucasArts/ Scupltured Software
- **» RELEASED:** 1992-1994
- **» GENRE:** Run-and-gun

Cast your mind back to a time not so long ago when the Super Nintendo and Sega Mega Drive were the game console kings, and a certain Mr. Lucas had given us a mere three instalments of his interstellar movie juggernaut; the bonafide sci-fi classics *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back*, and another one with Ewoks. Released in 1992, *Super Star Wars* was a state-of-the-art mix of platform action and 3D shoot-'em-up sections, culminating in the famous X-Wing trench run – arguably the closest interactive experience the film franchise had yet seen. It became a major ace in the sleeve for Nintendo's battle against arch-rival Sega, and a future benchmark for action games on the SNES.

"I started working at Lucasfilm Games in 1988 as a designer/ programmer," recalls Kalani Streicher, producer and lead designer of the *Super Star Wars* trilogy. "At the time they were trying to expand into the European markets and looking for someone who was fluent in German. I fitted the bill and they hired me immediately. My first project was *Zak McKracken And The Alien Mindbenders* with lead designer David Fox. As we were finishing the game I started working on porting and localising all of the story games such as *Maniac Mansion* and *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade* into various European languages on a variety of platforms." After building up and managing LucasArts' localisation department, and a brief programming stint on Brian Moriarty's *Loom*, Kalani finally asked the question many working at the company had been itching to for years. Lucasfilm had previously shied away from entering *Star Wars* territory for its gaming releases, the nearest it had come being an abandoned attempt at a point-and-click adventure from Hal Barwood, designer of *Indiana Jones And The Fate of Atlantis*.

"Lucasfilm was very focused on the PC platforms, such as the IBM, Mac, Amiga and Atari ST," explains Kalani. "A bunch of us wanted to work on console games and a handful of them wanted to work on *Star Wars*, including myself. Basically we asked our manager, Steve Arnold, 'Why aren't we on console, and why aren't we developing *Star Wars* games for it?" He replied, 'Do you guys want to do it? Go for it!' And off we

IN THE BEGINNING

"YOU CAN'T START a *Star Wars* game without the crawler. That's inconceivable!" says Kalani of his homage to the famous opening of *A New Hope*. "I wanted the game to start exactly the same way as the movie, with the text crawler and the camera pan to the spaceship and planet. I wanted the player to truly believe they were watching a movie and immersing themselves immediately in becoming Luke Skywalker. The in-game cut-scenes were directly from the movies and/or photo archives. For me, the cut-scenes had the purpose of grounding the player to the authenticity of the movies, and then let them interact and explore the environments as they were playing the levels"

went building a *Star Wars* game for console." Kalani teamed up with Utah-based developer Sculptured Software, producing *Star Wars* for the NES, a platform action game based on the plot of the first movie which became a template for the later Super Nintendo title and its sequels, *Super Star Wars: Empire Strikes Back* and *Return Of The Jedi*. The relationship with Sculptured would remain for all three Super Nintendo games.

"My vision was to create the first trilogy on a single platform for our fans," Kalani tells us. "We were slightly behind the curve getting onto the SNES, though in the end we pulled off the release of each game from the *Star Wars* trilogy back-to-back, year after year, which I'm very proud of." As an avid gamer himself, Kalani demonstrates admirable taste when revealing the titles that inspired his first Super Nintendo project. "I was a big fan of platform games and side-scrollers," he says. "*Contra, Super Castlevania, Turrican* and *Mega Man* on SNES were my favourite games. I was also playing the *Willow* arcade game, which inspired me to push the visual quality on the SNES above other games. I wanted it to be as good a side-scroller as *Contra* or *Castlevania,* with the visual quality of arcade games such as *Willow* or *Street Fighter*, and vehicle gameplay using Mode 7 as seen in *F-Zero*."

» *Super Star Wars* was rereleased on PS Vita and PS4 in 2015 and included trophy support.

» The Cantina boss is based on one of the creatures in the film's holographic chess set.

> **"We were the first to combine genres of side-scroller and third/first-person vehicle-combat for the SNES"**

Mode 7, the Super Nintendo's unique and much-touted graphics mode, allows for the rapid manipulation and scaling of a background 'landscape', the first instance in *Super Star Wars* being the early landspeeder stage, as Luke travels towards a Sandcrawler encountering a bunch of really annoying Jawas. Though primitive by modern standards, the use of this technique made recreating seminal vehicular *Star Wars* moments possible in a way that wowed gamers of the time. Later series highlights would include the Hoth Snowspeeder vs. AT-AT battles of *Super Empire Strikes Back,* and the gripping dash of the Millennium Falcon through the bowels of the unfinished Death Star Mk II in *Super Return Of The Jedi*.

"I wanted to allow players to interact with their favourite *Star Wars* vehicles in third or

first-person perspective, and experience the different aspects they'd seen in the movies," says Kalani. "You might say we were the first to combine genres of side-scroller and third/first-person vehicle combat for the SNES. I didn't want to utilise the vehicles in a side-scrolling or top-down fashion. I wanted the player to feel like they were in the vehicle racing across the desert or through the galaxy."

> "I wanted the player to feel like they were in the vehicle racing across the desert or through the galaxy"

Indeed, the series succeeds in recreating the atmosphere of the films remarkably well, from the opening text crawl over Tatooine in *Super Star Wars*, to the Lucas-esque screen wipes and imposing rendition of John Williams' score. Each game closely follows the plot of the relevant film, transitioning through platform sections with memorable bosses like the Sarlacc Pit Monster, Boba Fett, and the Rancor, and interspersed with story-progressing cut-scenes. With a rich tapestry of characters, creatures and vehicles to draw on from the films, the team took pride in attempting to present as authentic a *Star Wars* console experience as possible. "I looked at every aspect of the movie in detail with the team and pointed out the environments and characters I wanted in the game," says Kalani. "We used reference materials and photos from Lucasfilm's photo library, and took reference pictures of the actual movie models from the Lucas Archives. Everybody on the team was a hardcore *Star Wars* fan. I was also producing the *X-Wing* game at the same time, which added even more extensive research of every spacecraft and ship in the game. I was heavily entrenched in getting the authenticity of the *Star Wars* universe into these games."

"Though from the beginning I wanted to retell the story of the movies in an interactive fashion," he continues, "I also knew, being the *Star Wars* geek myself, that I wanted to bring in elements that never were explained or expanded upon in the movies, especially areas or characters that were mentioned briefly in the films, such as fighting the *Star Wars* chess monster as a boss in the Cantina." Kalani is quick to praise what he describes as the "terrific relationship" between Lucasfilm and Sculptured Software over the course of the three games. "We were in control of all creative aspects of the game such as game design, art and animation, and Sculptured was responsible for coding the game," he explains. "Sculptured had a great engine, tools and development kits that allowed us to rapidly create levels and character animation. [Lead programmer] Peter Ward at Sculptured was an incredible engineer and a true *Star Wars* fan. I had such a blast working with him. Initially I created a design document outlining all specification and progression of the levels, characters and vehicles from the first to last

» The lush backgrounds of the Dagobah sections are some of the prettiest in the series.

»Moseying around Mos Eisley offered a whole lot of shades of beige to enjoy.

» This ED-209-looking lumbering monstrosity guards the Death Star hanger bay.

» Han attempts to escape the Carbonite freezing chamber. Hasn't he watched *Empire's* ending?

»For *Star Wars* nerds, Boba Fett's Slave 1 is pretty much the coolest boss in the game.

level. We then did storyboards for the plot progression, cinematics and story panels. My concept and art lead Harrison Fong storyboarded a lot of them, which we then passed on to the team and converted it into digital artwork."

In the original *Super Star Wars*, one of the early stand-out platform stages involves Luke making his way to the top of a massive Sandcrawler brimming with hostile turrets and yet more pesky Jawas. "We did several iterations on the Sandcrawler and wanted to make the player feel like they were climbing up a huge vehicle and that the level was moving as you are jumping from platform to platform, "says Kalani. Later stages give players an opportunity to control alternate heroes, such as Chewbacca in the Cantina stage, or Han Solo taking on hordes of slightly inept stormtroopers en route to the Falcon in Mos Eisley. A ride in Han's iconic galactic rustbucket, a daring rescue, and a brush with a trash compacter later the famous Death Star run awaits you. "We knew from the start that we had to have this level, and this was the climax of the game," says Kalani of the famous X-Wing sequence. "It had to live up to the then-in-the-arcades *Star Wars* game trench run. The SNES and its Mode 7 feature were perfect for this and allowed us to give the player an incredible climactic moment."

Working with Mode 7 graphics proved very much a mixture of trial and error on *Super Star Wars*. "It was our first attempt to utilise Mode 7 in a different way than other games," Kalani explains. "The landspeeder stage had to show progression, moving across a desert towards the mountains in the distance. It was a fine balance of sprite usage for the terrain, enemy characters and distant parallaxing of the mountain range. We had to take that one step further with the X-Wing level, flying across the surface and then down the trench allowing the player to be able to move anywhere in space. And lastly integrating the Millenium Falcon took several iterations. It is such a unique ship that we fairly quickly ran out of sprites/tiles. We had to pull off every trick we had in the book for those sections." One interesting side note Kalani offers is that the atmospheric platform section set inside the Death Star nearly didn't make it into the finished game. "That level was difficult to pull off and barely avoided the chopping block," he remembers. "I remember contemplating many times cutting it, but I am glad that we found a way to make it work and keep it in the game."

For the sequels, Lucasflim and Sculptured continued to refine their game engine, packing in ever more content and visual advancements with the help of increased cartridge capacities. The series finale, *Super Return of the Jedi*, was the largest; with its 16-Megabit cart it was twice the size of the original *Super Star Wars*. The desire to innovate and improve was not without its share of technical stumbling blocks. "We were constantly pushing the SNES and adding as much content as possible from the *Star Wars* universe from one game to another, challenging and trying to outdo ourselves each time. In *Super Empire* the most challenging parts were of course the AT-AT /snowspeeder levels and the Millennium Falcon. These are iconic vehicles that needed to behave and feel like they did in the movie.

"For the AT-AT sequence, using Mode 7 for such a big vehicle was difficult. We were definitely pushing the capabilities of the SNES hardware. The cable release and circling of the snowspeeder was incredibly hard. We spent many long hours refining the gameplay to make it work. And in *Super Jedi* the speeder bike scene and final flight through the inside of the Death Star wasn't easy. For the speeder bike

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

MANIAC MANSION (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: VARIOUS CONSOLES AND COMPUTERS
YEAR: 1987

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND
SYSTEM: VARIOUS CONSOLES AND COMPUTERS
YEAR: 1990

INDIANA JONES AND THE FATE OF ATLANTIS
SYSTEM: PC DOS, MAC, AMIGA
YEAR: 1992

X-WING
SYSTEM: PC DOS, MAC
YEAR: 1993

HEART-STOPPING MOMENTS

SUPER STAR WARS

R2-D2 has been captured by Jawas, and Luke must battle to the top of an enormous Sandcrawler, then through its dingy, hazardous innards to rescue him.

From farm boy to starship pilot, young Skywalker's final challenge is the terrifying Death Star trench, and a face-off with Vader's TIE Advanced.

SUPER EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

As the Empire attacks the Rebel base on Hoth, Luke grabs a snowspeeder and attempts to take down an incoming battalion of giant AT-AT walkers.

The climactic showdown high on the gantries of Bespin sees Luke having to draw upon all his newly-acquired Jedi skills in order to defeat his old man.

SUPER RETURN OF THE JEDI

Mean, bad-tempered and certainly no oil-painting, the Rancor will leave you wondering if breaking into Jabba's palace was such a good idea after all.

In the Millennium Falcon, Lando Calrissian redeems himself with a daring raid on the unfinished Death Star II in the memorable finale of the saga.

chase the most difficult part was creating believable trees moving past at high speeds. Because of the difficulty I considered many other design perspectives such as isometric or top-down views, but they never felt as dramatic as the Mode 7 version."

One gameplay aspect that was greatly improved for both sequels was the addition of RPG-style character development, with Luke gradually gaining a number of useful Force Powers including the ability to heal, levitate, deflect attacks or even mind control enemies. The downside is that powers can be only be collected from certain locations in each game, meaning they can be easily missed by the not-so prudent Jedi. "Balancing the Force Powers wasn't easy," admits Kalani. "We had to anticipate players getting through a level with or without them. For me it was an integral part of character evolution and player progression (levelling up of a character) in adding Force Powers in *Super Empire* and *Super Jedi*."

For *Super Empire Strikes* back, the initial platform stages on Hoth added an extra dimension of difficulty due to the slippy-slidey nature of the planet's icy terrain. "This was our first attempt to add a 'slippery' factor to gameplay," Kalani comments. "It was difficult to test because of the many ways to slide into objects and assure proper collision. We also had to work hard on making the tiling of ice pieces look organic and not too repetitive. I enjoyed all the levels and am glad we added Han Solo and Chewie throughout these levels." However, these stages, along with some of the more sprawling, hazard-filled levels and increasingly fearsome bosses of both sequels, still attract criticism over their degree of difficulty, despite the addition of level passcodes.

"I get that a lot," chuckles Kalani. "These were difficult games. We were aiming at the hardcore. Everybody was a hardcore player back then! I definitely could not deliver such difficult games today. In hindsight, I would reduce the enemy damage by 10-20 per cent, make the player character able to absorb more damage, add more power-ups and improve level design. Though I wouldn't want to make it too easy – it has to be challenging. The player needs to feel like they are earning the Force. My excuse for the difficulty of those games in Yoda's words is: 'You are not a Jedi yet. Much training you will need!'"

Overall, Kalani tells us that there really isn't that much he would change about his SNES gaming trilogy in hindsight. "I'm very happy how the games turned out," he admits. "We did an incredible job getting this trilogy out back-to-back each Christmas. There are a couple of elements I wish we could have incorporated if we would have had more time, such as all the levels, characters and bosses we had to cut from the game – with each game we built more levels than we actually shipped. I'd also make the games a bit easier to play. I'm very fond of the *Super Star Wars* trilogy and very pleased with its popularity. They were my very first games and we had such fun designing and developing them."

» A mysterious masked bounty hunter causes havoc in the halls of Jabba's Palace…

"These were difficult games. We were aiming at the hardcore. Everybody was a hardcore player back then!"

We thought it might be fun to ask Kalani if, like us, he had any favourites out of the many memorable *Star Wars* moments found across the trilogy. "There are so many favourite moments," he replies. "A lot of them had to do with gameplay as well as the technical challenges they presented. In *Super Star Wars* my favourites are the landspeeder and trench run levels. In *Super Empire* it's definitely the snowspeeder/AT-AT level. Who doesn't

WHAT THE PRESS SAID

"THERE'S A MINI *Star Wars* revival on right now, bringing with it lots of good things – books, a fab comic, one brilliant PC game (*X-Wing*) and this, not only the best film game on the SNES, but a real contender for best of its type on any system."
SUPER STAR WARS IMPORT REVIEW, SUPER PLAY, FEBRUARY 1993

"TAKING ONLY MINOR liberties with the plot of the film, *Super Star Wars* is a milestone in movie tie-ins which shows just how this type of game should be done. The best soundtracks and spot effects ever heard on the SNES combine with graphics and stunning cut sequences to recreate a real feeling of playing the movie."
NINTENDO MAGAZINE SYSTEM, FEBRUARY 1993

» *Super Empire Strikes Back* puts you behind the controls of the iconic Millennium Falcon for the first time.

» You too can control a hyperactive four-foot teddy bear.

want to take down and AT-AT? That was incredibly difficult, but we managed to pull it off. One of my favourite levels is also the Carbonite Freezing Chamber playing as Chewbacca. You had to keep moving and were fighting jet troopers, stormtroopers with shields and bombs, various bounty hunters and the little pesky Ugnaughts. The Darth Vader levels were also a treat. It's so emotional going up against Vader no matter how pixelated he looked. By this time the player had all of the different Forces accessible and Luke was at his most powerful. Jon Knowles, my animation supervisor, did an awesome job animating Darth with the limited sprites we had available."

"In *Super Jedi* it's definitely the Rancor. It's the biggest beast in the *Star Wars* universe, and so satisfying when you take it down. The sail-barge level was also exciting. For the first time we could create and show what the sail-barge looked like on the outside and inside. In addition, we were able to go up against a slew of bounty hunters and strange creatures. And you got to play Princess Leia with her chain weapon in a bikini! Then of course there are the final levels flying the Falcon inside the Death Star. The climax of the entire trilogy racing to the core and back out in the nick of time blasting the Death Star into a million pieces. Finally, the showdown with the Emperor was a fun level to design. The difficulty was in creating the scene with the round window. It took a lot of tiles to look right. And then giving the Emperor all of his lightning effect powers…"

Before his departure from LucasArts in 2011, *Star Wars: Force Unleashed* producer Haden Blackman stated that he would have loved to see a modern revival of the *Super Star Wars* series. We wonder if Kalani would be game.

"Definitely, I'd be all over that project," Kalani enthuses. "It's the game that catapulted LucasArts into the console space and it can do it again on the new platforms. I've been trying to convince LucasArts to recreate the *Super Star Wars* trilogy for tablets, handhelds or Xbox Live Arcade/PSN. If given that opportunity I'd keep the essence of the original, though reinvent and innovate the game with today's gameplay mechanics, give it a visual facelift and, of course, pack it with even more *Star Wars* goodies including additional environments, characters, bosses and vehicles from the movie. I'd also add a mode where players can create additional content to the game, like *LittleBigPlanet*. Maybe readers could start petitioning LucasArts for a new *Super Star Wars* series on the new platforms. I'm totally up for it, and it will be even better than the original…"

SETTLE A SCORE

THE SUPERB RENDITION of the *Star Wars* theme music featured on the title screen of all three games in the trilogy was a feature that surprised Kalani as much as the rest of us. "We had an incredible audio technician on the team," he says. "I remember when I heard the *Star Wars* theme in the game for the first time. I literally said, 'Oh myGod, how did he do this and fit it on the SNES cartridge? It sounds identical to the movie!' It was incredible to hear it in the game and I was literally blown away. Hats off to Paul Webb at Sculptured for his dedication and passion in creating the best movie music score on the SNES. I still get comments today that the Super Nintendo score is the best on any console!"

TOP 25 SNES GAMES

Retro Gamer readers reveal their favourite ever SNES games. Find out if yours made the final cut

SimCity

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD
YEAR: 1991 **GENRE:** STRATEGY

25 **It may be** primarily remembered as a PC franchise but, with numerous changes and additions to this console port, it's little wonder so many of you cited it as a SNES favourite. Developed by Nintendo EAD rather than Maxis, this version has a distinct Japanese flavour and several beautiful Nintendo twists – seeing Bowser stomp through the city is up there with the greatest gaming moments. The team did a great job of making it work with a controller rather than a mouse, too.

ActRaiser

DEVELOPER: QUINTET
YEAR: 1990 **GENRE:** STRATEGY/ACTION

24 **The beauty of** *ActRaiser* is that it is effectively two games in one. Half god game – albeit without any direct religious references, thanks to Nintendo's hard-line self-censorship of the time – half action game, all awesome. While it's true that neither part is a dedicated example of the genres in question, it's the unique fusion that makes this so memorable. Putting town creation and management on hold to go kick some ass is something that no other game can offer.

Cybernator

DEVELOPER: NCS CORP
YEAR: 1992 **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

23 **A surprisingly strong** showing in support of this shooter sees it make the list ahead of bona fide classics like *Super Punch-Out!*, but you've gotta love the underdog. It's an inventive mech shooter that really makes you feel like you're in control of a huge, complex piece of kit and it still holds up brilliantly today. The same can't be said of the budget PlayStation 2 remake, sadly – our advice would be to just stick with the original…

Zombies Ate My Neighbours

DEVELOPER: LUCASARTS
YEAR: 1993 **GENRE:** RUN-AND-GUN

22 **There's a lot** to be said for this B-movie shooter, so we're not overly surprised to see you come out in numbers to support it. The recent sad loss of LucasArts might have done something to bolster its following, but it's certainly not ill-deserved – the humour, style and tight gameplay are such that many modern developers would kill to put their name to something as polished and refined as this.

Perhaps the original great co-op game, *Zombies Ate My Neighbours* lets protagonists Zeke and Julie use anything they can find to hold off the zombie apocalypse and secure the safety of the guys and gals that live down the street. But it's not just zombies – variety here is exceptional and, over the course of the game, you'll find yourself gunning down pretty much every B-movie cliché – from giant ants to vampires and aliens. But it doesn't stop there, as the level with the gigantic rampaging baby perfectly displays. It keeps you guessing by constantly changing things up – even though gameplay changes little, that each stage can feel entirely unique is amazing.

Said variety extends beyond simply switching enemy sprites out for new ones, too. It's the weapons, an improvised arsenal comprising of everything from water pistols to rocket launchers. It's the settings, myriad slices of suburbia pulled straight out of every low-budget horror movie ever made. And it's the characters – even the titular neighbours come in all shapes and forms, with each of them worth a different amount of points if you can save them in time. Thankfully, you don't need to rescue them all but, the more you manage to free, the better your score will be. And just like most games in this genre, that's all that really matters.

Super Aleste

DEVELOPER: COMPILE
YEAR: 1992 **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

20 **An excellent shooter,** as evidenced by the fact that it managed to beat the likes of *Super R-Type*, *Gradius III* and *UN Squadron*. A rich and varied arsenal is what really makes *Super Aleste* stand out, each of the eight weapons offering six different levels of power. Furthermore, each can be modified at the touch of a button, adding reverse fire (or similar area coverage) or changing properties to give options that can more or less cover every situation the game throws at you. Like pretty much every shooter, there's a problem in that death causes you to respawn with virtually no firepower – but there's a simple solution to that problem: just be better at the game. Solved.

EarthBound

DEVELOPER: APE/HAL LABORATORY
YEAR: 1994 **GENRE:** RPG

19 **It may not** have had a UK release, but that seems to have had little impact on the popularity of this glorious RPG. Perhaps offered a little more exposure thanks to Ness's appearance in *Super Smash Bros*, this quirky little title can take pride of place in any collection – mint originals now change hands for upwards of 500 quid. Why? It's one of the few retro classics not to have seen a re-release in any form, despite constant calls for it to come to Virtual Console. Still, all that is set to change now, as the cult RPG has finally been released on Nintendo's digital service. Let's see if that does anything to the insane price that original copies currently go for…

Donkey Kong Country 2: Diddy's Kong Quest

DEVELOPER: RARE
YEAR: 1995 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

21 **If you could** all have just pulled together and decided amongst yourselves which *Donkey Kong Country* game was best, it could quite easily have made the top five. Instead, divided opinion gives us two *Kong* games in this list, Rare's platform sequel just missing out on the top 20. Quite how DK came to be kidnapped in the first place is a conversation for another time, though it's clear that Diddy and Dixie can handle themselves well enough without him. It was around this point that Rare's love affair with collectibles began, so those that have enjoyed cleaning up and finding everything in the likes of *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Star Fox Adventures* would do well to recognise where it all started.

Super Mario All-Stars

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD
YEAR RELEASED: 1993 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

18 **A compilation and** console bundle title it may be, but far be it from that to exclude this collection of timeless games from your list. Sporting enhanced versions of the three NES *Mario* titles as well as super-tough variant *The Lost Levels* – famously *Super Mario Bros 2* in Japan, while we received a massively modified version of *Doki Doki Panic* – this is pretty much platforming heaven. Any one of the collected games would be worthy of a spot on this list alone, so the combination of all four is pretty much a shoo-in. You could buy a console and get by for months just on the single bundled game, which is not something that can be said of any console since. Later versions also included *Super Mario World*, which you can safely expect to read more about in the coming pages. Just a guess.

Super Tennis

DEVELOPER: TOKYO SHOSEKI
YEAR RELEASED: 1991 **GENRE:** SPORTS

17 **Early titles are** always going to live large in the hearts of fans – they're the ones that get the most play while you're waiting for the next big game, after all. We can all but assume that's why this 1991 title earned a spot on this list, although we'd struggle to point to an earlier multiplayer sports game that we got so much enjoyment out of. Making tennis quick and fun was a masterstroke, though even the points that dragged on proved to be hugely enjoyable – that's why we saw the same arcade template applied to *Smash Court Tennis* and, later, *Virtua Tennis*. We're all for simulation but, when it comes to a quick sporting thrill, we'd struggle to name many better games than this beauty. It sure as hell beats leaping around the lounge with a remote in your hand, that's for sure.

Super Bomberman

DEVELOPER: HUDSON SOFT
YEAR RELEASED: 1993 **GENRE:** ACTION

16 **Again, *Bomberman* would** be higher on this list if it weren't for the fact that gamers had no less than five different kinds of *Super* to consider in this case. Ignoring the fact that the console had just two controller ports, Konami elected to use an adorable multi-tap to allow for showdowns on a scale never before seen on console. Later games introduced more elements tailored to accommodate multiplayer massacres and, to be frank, we'd probably rather have seen one of these make the list than the simple original. However, there's a lot to be said for getting there first, and for all of you who voted for any of the superb sequels you can at least find solace in the fact that the little bobble-headed murderer managed to get onto the list at all. And we're glad he did – there are few better tests of pure gaming skill than a *Bomberman* face-off. Quite how this franchise wound up entertaining kart racers and sports games we'll never know – it remains one of the best and purest multiplayer experiences in the entirety of gaming.

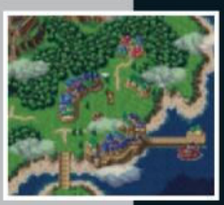
Donkey Kong Country

DEVELOPER: RARE
YEAR: 1994 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

15 **Poor old Retro.** As much as it tried its best to recapture the magic of the originals, in essence it's just not the same – the music, the design and the well judged level of difficulty were all nailed the first time around. A stunning effort by Rare.

Chrono Trigger

DEVELOPER: SQUARE
YEAR: 1995 **GENRE:** RPG



14 **As if this** time-hopping RPG classic wasn't going to make this list. *As if.* Any game that stars a noble frog warrior is one that we fully support, so we'll take any excuse we can get to celebrate this wonderful action-RPG from Square's archives.

Star Fox

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD/ARGONAUT SOFTWARE **YEAR:** 1993
GENRE: SHOOT-'EM-UP

13 **This is more** than deserving of recognition for its introduction of useless gaming baggage Slippy Toad alone. It's just a shame that its pioneering 3D visuals will forever take a back seat due to the 'do a barrel roll' meme it spawned.

Final Fantasy VI

DEVELOPER: SQUARE
YEAR: 1994 **GENRE:** RPG

12 **Picking just one** of Square's 16-bit *Final Fantasy* games is a near-impossible choice, so well done for settling on this one. Echoes of *FFVI* can be felt in every canon game since, and its Uematsu soundtrack is enough to secure it a place on this rundown alone.

F-Zero

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD
YEAR: 1990 **GENRE:** RACING

11 **Racing games are** boring? Yeah, nice try. A futuristic setting and amazing 3D visuals made this an unforgettable experience for everyone who played it, though it's saddening that we haven't seen a new version since the exceptional *GX* on GameCube.

Super Castlevania IV

DEVELOPER: KONAMI
YEAR RELEASED: 1991 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

10 **Ask most people** which is their favourite *Castlevania* and, more often than not, you'll hear *Symphony Of The Night*. While the PlayStation game is a spectacular display of genre-straddling RPG action, there's a hardcore arcade purity to *Super Castlevania IV* that gives it the edge. The music, the bosses, the sheer variety… this is the stuff of legend and its reverence is far from ill-deserved. Action-platforming with a gothic slant, you could walk for miles and not find anyone who has gotten past the second level – *Dark Souls* and its ilk may claim to have created the hardcore sector, but we know better. *Castlevania* was there first. And if you can claim to have finished this, that's something that counts for a lot on your gaming CV – arcade coin-munchers have nothing on this beast.

Secret Of Mana

DEVELOPER: SQUARE
YEAR RELEASED: 1993 **GENRE:** ACTION-RPG

9 **There had to** be at least one Square RPG in the top ten and, with so many failing to get European releases, it stands to reason that this should be the one to make the cut. Three-player co-op was a unique selling point but, even without that, *Secret Of Mana* would still hold up brilliantly. This action-RPG managed to tick every box, from a unique leveling system to a great cast of characters that could be tailored to your own whim. Despite several sequels, this remains the best game in the series – the PlayStation sequel has its fans, but their numbers are feeble compared to those who would back the original. To this day, we've yet to see a truly great *Mana* follow-up and, while it's unlikely that we'll see one in this play-safe environment, it'd be a retro insta-win if Square announced a new *Mana* game tomorrow.

Pilotwings

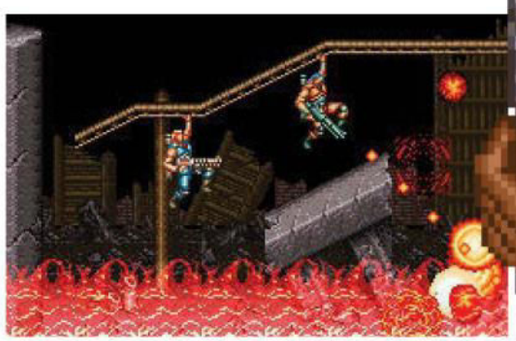
DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD
YEAR RELEASED: 1990 **GENRE:** FLIGHT SIMULATION

8 **Tech demos seem** to be the order of the day lately, with the likes of Wii Sports and Kinect Adventures capturing the imaginations of millions. But this beat all of them to the punch, a showcase for the unknown power of the SNES and an early glimpse at the magic of 3D. Few could have imagined that a flight game would be the one to show off what the SNES was truly capable of, but that's precisely what *Pilotwings* did. Three-dimensional gaming wouldn't become the norm until years later, but we can't forget who planted that seed – few did it better either, to be fair. In terms of offering a unique experience, few titles can rub shoulders with *Pilotwings*. Even the N64 and 3DS updates never really managed to recapture the magic of the original, fun as they may be.

Contra III: The Alien Wars

DEVELOPER: KONAMI
YEAR RELEASED: 1992 **GENRE:** RUN-AND-GUN

7 **Anyone that throws** their hardcore weight around based on recent accomplishments like finishing *Dark Souls* or *Super Meat Boy* would do well to pop back in time and give this monster a go. Whatever you choose to call it, this is pretty much the epitome of hardcore – dudes be coming from everywhere, and all of them will kill you in a single hit. *Contra* had lost its way recently until *Hard Corps* brought it back – it's rare that a sequel nails exactly what was so good about the original but that's what Arc managed to do. The original still presents an awesome challenge and one that anyone can be proud to have conquered. Pretty much the ultimate run-and-gun game, *Contra III* exists to kick the ass of anyone who tries to play it. As you probably know. If not, give it a shot today and don't even vaguely expect to win.



Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD
YEAR RELEASED: 1995 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

6 **We have to** be honest – we thought this classic platformer would come in a little higher. But with *Super Mario World* stealing the majority of the vote, we guess it was a 'one or the other' mindset in most cases. Either way, this dino-themed sequel performed admirably and, while we wouldn't want to have to make a pitch as to which was the better game, the egg-tossing love this game has received pretty much does that for us. Platform games don't come much better than this, especially when they don't involve the bugs or bandicoots that have come to define the genre.

Super Metroid

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO R&D1/INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS
YEAR RELEASED: 1994 **GENRE:** ACTION/ADVENTURE

5 **Few games have** laid out their stalls quite so well as this. *Super Metroid* basically doesn't say a word, but it doesn't need to. If anything, that's the joy of it – the mystery is what keeps you playing and, even when you know what you're doing, this is not an easy world to explore. Setting the template for an entire sub-genre, this can happily claim to be one of the most influential games ever made. The recent Virtual Console Wii U re-release has given us such greats as 'Y can't Metroid crawl', cementing it as one of the great work-it-out-as-you-go-along games out there…

Super Mario Kart

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD
YEAR RELEASED: 1992 **GENRE:** RACER

4 **Another obvious choice,** although it'd take a real Blue Shell enthusiast (there's no such thing) to claim that *Mario Kart* was a fair way to settle disputes. Still, few would argue that this wasn't one of the great multiplayer games of our time, especially in the age before the game-breaking Blue Shell came into play. Multiplayer rivalries can still be settled with this tried and tested method, although many cite more recent games – *Double Dash*, *MK7* and even the Wii version – as the best. There's no right answer... well, okay, there is. And it's not *Mario Kart 64*.

Street Fighter II Turbo

DEVELOPER: CAPCOM
YEAR RELEASED: 1992 **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP

3 **If you owned** a SNES and had a second controller, chances are you doubled up for the opportunity to show your mates what a Dragon Punch or a Flash Kick was. *Street Fighter* was *the* go-to competitive game at the time and, while we've since learned to play on stick, that wasn't really an option back then. Capcom did an incredible job of bringing the arcade experience home – there are few better coin-op conversions than this one and it was this kind of perfect port that made your friends with a Mega Drive incredibly jealous.

The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD
YEAR RELEASED: 1991 **GENRE:** ACTION-RPG

2 **Arguments will rage** until the end of time as to which of Link's adventures is the best (ironically, it's *definitely* not *Link's Adventure*) but it's this seminal title and *Ocarina Of Time* that most often find themselves tussling for the top spot. While the 3D debut was unquestionably a masterpiece, it likely wouldn't have existed at all had it not been for this beautiful and surprisingly open RPG – it might have offered slightly more direction than the NES original but it still managed to feel like you were lost in a strange world with only your wits (well, those and whatever tools you could loot from dungeons) to rely on. The reveal of the Dark World ranks up there with the best gaming surprises of all time. Eat your heart out, Kojima…

Super Mario World

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD **YEAR RELEASED:** 1990 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

Nintendo's mascot was always going to be a clear favourite to claim the top spot on this list, but the landslide took even those of us expecting a moustachioed number one by surprise. Mario didn't just walk this list – he grabbed a Cape Feather and flew over the top of the whole damn thing.

With *Super Mario World* appearing as a pack-in with many console bundles, this would have been the first experience of 16-bit gaming for many people. And what a way to start – it'd be like your first taste of meat being a huge T-bone steak, or your first car after passing your test being a Ferrari. This is seen by many as being as close as we've come to platforming perfection and, truth be told, we're in no position to argue. We still play *Super Mario World* regularly to this day and we're *still* discovering new tricks and secrets hidden away in the many, many stages.

There's so much to talk about in celebration of *Super Mario World* that it's difficult to know where to begin. But, we'll start as is logical – with pretty much the first thing you see when starting up the game. The map structure isn't entirely new, with *Super Mario Bros 3* pulling much the same stunt albeit broken down by level. But, it's the improved sense of scale that comes from having one big map that really makes this feel like an epic journey, and one where the route – and even the destination – aren't always clear. Find a hidden exit to a stage and you can find yourself branching out into areas far more difficult than you're used to. But, with so many routes on offer, there's no shame in returning to the beaten path in order to hurry along your journey to Bowser's castle.

Then, there's the way that each of the power-ups changes how you approach and traverse each stage. A cape will let you soar up to hidden cloud platforms if you can get the speed up to get lift in the first place, while a fire flower lets you muscle your way past many obstacles. There are even a few situational pickups (such as the one that turns Mario into a balloon) to use and abuse, though it's definitely the trusty mushroom that will see the most use. You can even keep one of these back in reserve – useful if you know you'll need it later in a tricky level and don't want to risk losing it along the way.

Whether or not there's such a thing as a perfect game is an argument that will never be won. Whether or not *Super Mario World* is the closest thing we've seen to one, though? That's not even up for debate.

What Makes It So Super

Hidden Exits

If you've got the right power-up and an explorer's spirit, there are loads of secret ways to end levels prematurely. Doing so can open up new paths that let you speed across the world map, as Star Road fans will know

Dino Might

Yoshi eggs are hidden away in many of the blocks scattered around *Mario World*, and unleashing the beast is always a joy. Not only does he offer you an extra hit, there are also certain areas that you simply can't reach without him

Perfect Design

Variety counts for a lot, though it's the fact that there's no weak link that proves the most amazing. Whether swimming, soaring, riding or climbing, *Super Mario World* never so much as misses a beat

Star Power

Soaring above the world is Star Road, a set of super-tough stages with secret exits on every one. If you know where to find the lot, you can finish the entire game in less than ten minutes

Endless Replayability

So many exits, so many routes, so many tiny little secrets to find... there's just so much to this game that, as we said, we're still finding new power-ups and hidden areas to this day. As close to the perfect platformer as you can get, basically

PAL VERSION
RESET
EJECT
POWER
ON
OFF
POWER
Nintendo
SUPER NINTENDO
ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM

SUPER

The SNES is a great console to collect for. Follow this guide and you won't go far wrong

» **Manufacturer:** Nintendo » **Models:** Super Nintendo/Super Famicom » **Launched:** 1990 » **Country of Origin:** Japan

NINTENDO

The Collector's Guide

» It wasn't just the games that came in flimsy cardboard boxes, making anything in-tact more valuable.

WHY IT'S COLLECTABLE

Growing up in the Nineties wasn't easy. From an early age, many gamers found themselves thrown into the epicentre of a digital war between two Japanese forces to be reckoned with.

Sega and Nintendo's conflict controlled the playgrounds and workplace, *Sonic* against *Mario*. The battle continues today, as the mention of the Super Nintendo versus the Sega Mega Drive has collectors raising their control pads with pride.

Despite hosting fewer games than Sega's 16-bit offering, the SNES hosts a wealth of blockbuster hits amongst its huge library of over 500 known European releases. With the likes of *Super Mario World*, *F-Zero* and *Pilotwings* available from day one, shortly followed by *Super Mario Kart*, *Mega Man X* and *The Legend of Zelda: A Link To The Past*, it is no wonder that it has continued to captivate gamers to present day. However, it wasn't just about the high quality software available. Given that the gaming world had just experienced a very hard-edged and ugly selection of consoles (such as the NES and Master System), the arrival of an alluring curved console bundled with a comfortable control pad was too good to dismiss.

Where collecting is concerned, a large majority of the SNES catalogue has seen a considerable rise in value over the last few years from an influx of nostalgia-hungry gamers. But, surely these financial skirmishes taking place on auction sites are just as prominent for the Super Nintendo's 16-bit rival? Luckily, the Sega Mega Drive fans are much safer from this barrage of collectors due to one conclusive reason. Up until the Nintendo Gamecube, every game branded with the Official Nintendo Seal was released within a flimsy cardboard box. With so few mint condition boxed games available (in comparison to the near indestructible hard-cased Mega Drive games), they are highly sought after, as collectors challenge each other to replicate that brand new feeling again.

As time passed by and Mario's newest home began to build up an incredible momentum within Europe, a sporadic release schedule shortly followed and reared its ugly head. A large chunk of the rarest PAL releases originated from a single country, leaving frustrated gamers and collectors today trawling countless top-level domain variations of eBay. Of these rarities, *X Zone* (Scandinavia), *Whirlo* (Spain), *Cool World* (Spain), *Sonic Blast Man* (Spain) *Space Invaders* (Australia) and *Super Chase HQ* (Australia) tend to be the most sought after by 16-bit collectors around the world.

Although Nintendo had a wide range of multinational gamers, their hard work and dedication continued to ensure each Super Nintendo owner within Europe was catered for. Many releases were adjusted to better suit their target audiences – changes which often included alternate artwork, varying language options and occasionally 'classic' re-releases. Although this level of consideration sounds fantastic, those aiming to collect SNES variants face countless headaches due to the sheer volume of releases out there. *Super Mario World* is an extreme example of this, given its seventeen variants.

» The U.S. Super Nintendo pad dispensed with the bright colours of its PAL and Japanese counterparts.

DID YOU KNOW?

■ No matter how fondly you remember the aesthetic curves of the Super Nintendo console, a more minuscule and desirable iteration left the production line at Nintendo HQ. Dubbed the SNES Mini or SNES Jr, the redesigned console was released in both America and Japan for the low cost of $99.99 bundled with a pack-in game. While the baby-sized console never made its way to Europe, it remains a frequent purchase by those who missed out, but with a pinch of hesitation. In the most unusual case imaginable, the SNES Jr has been a victim of near perfect fakes arising on eBay over the years.

» There is quite a difference between Western and Japanese box art. Which you prefer is a matter of taste.

» Special edition cases were rare. If only they all came in metal tins, there would be a lot more complete packages today.

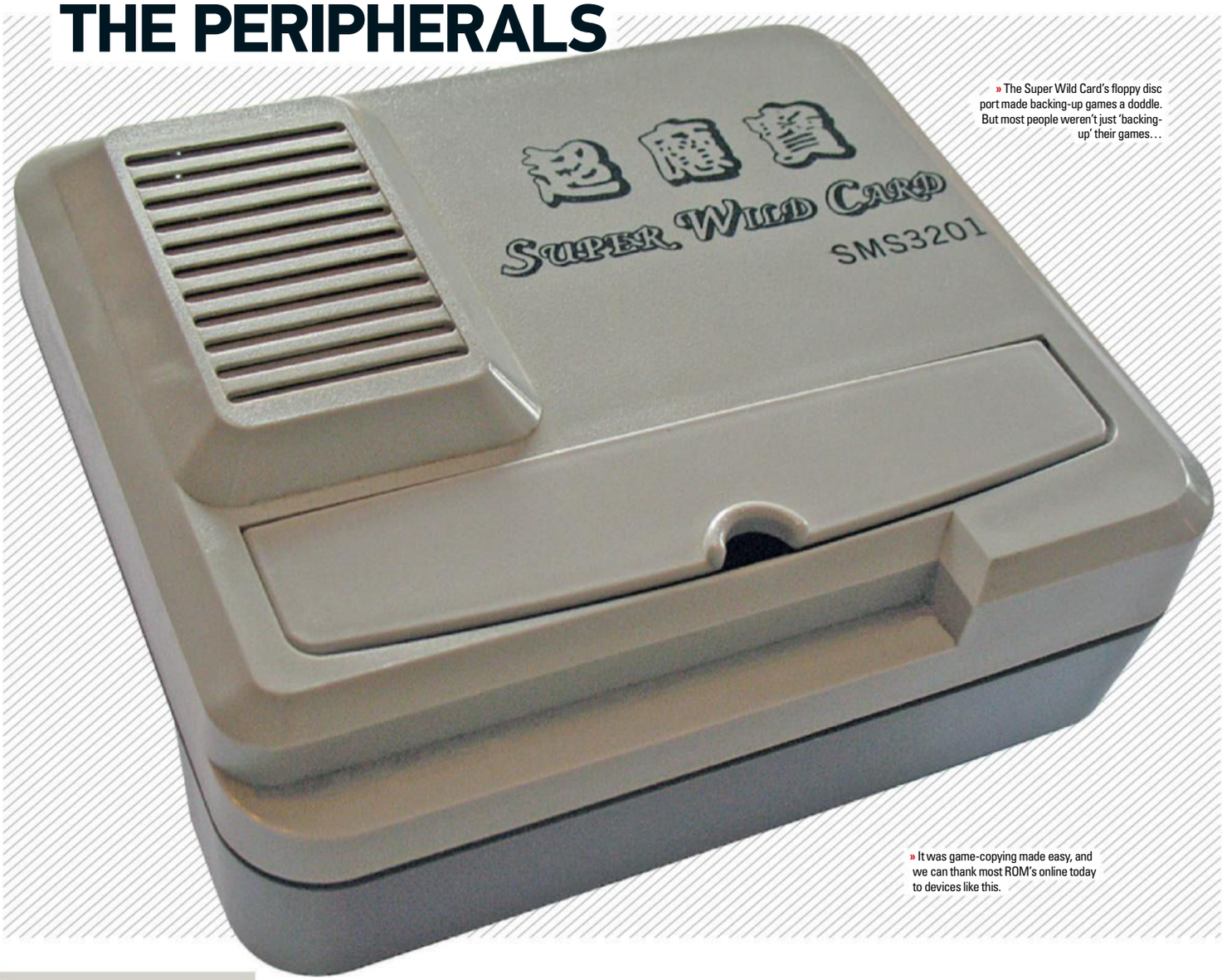
Complications aside, the Japanese and American release lists offered a much larger library of games, yet there was still a selection of prominent European releases which have gamers from across the pond intrigued. The most notable is the timeless Japanese RPG *Terranigma*, which for some untold reason saw a European localisation, yet nothing for gamers stateside. Auction snipers worldwide sit in wait for each and every time it surfaces, sadly driving the price up. *Whirlo*, *The Firemen* and *Super Bomberman 3* are other good examples of this, as European gamers often struggle to hold onto their hidden treasures.

One of the more interesting aspects to note during the 16-bit era, was how easy import games were to acquire. While the price tags within magazine adverts suggested that early arrivals of Japanese and American software were probably worth being patient for, there was one publication which almost justified these financial kidnappings. Simply known as *Super Play*, it is often referred to as the greatest gaming magazine of all time, due to its perfect combination of covering games and Japanese culture. As it focused mainly on imported titles months before their European release, a new wave of gamers were born unhappy with what their home country could offer. These disgruntled fans were often found excusing themselves as they happily paid premium prices to get their latest gaming hit way ahead of schedule. Whilst these purchases could often be expensive gambles, many of these investments have paid off, as gamers obtained classics such as *Earthbound*, *Final Fantasy III* (*VI*) and *Chrono Trigger* which never arrived in Europe. However, what they were unable to see at the time is how many of these exclusive imports would eventually fetch three figure sums, as they do today.

With such an enticement from abroad, often limited by how far our distressed wallets could be stretched, Super Nintendo fans were left questioning how they could enjoy the wealth of cartridges without skipping meals. Quite naturally, the black market was well aware of this fact and began to envision various ways to profiteer from the 16-bit juggernaut. While very few bootlegs found their way underneath the counter of less honest shops, the pirates had another device at the ready to potentially make the expensive cartridge medium a thing of the past. Given that a large majority of early cartridges could fit onto a single floppy disk, a disk drive was placed inside a Super Nintendo compatible device known as the Super Wild Card. Capable of backing up and loading cartridges from disk, this revolutionary and attractive piece of kit made stealing games all too easy. While there are more modern alternatives to this hardware, the Super Wild Card range and various other similar devices still get snapped up rather quickly due to their elusive nature.

Offering countless games spanning multiple regions and an array of diverse accessories, the Super Nintendo is by far one of the most desirable consoles to collect. Although the deep end of collecting is quickly requiring a well padded wallet to bask in, both gamers and collectors can take pleasure in the knowledge that the majority of the Super Nintendo's classic titles can still be had at a reasonable price.

THE PERIPHERALS



» The Super Wild Card's floppy disc port made backing-up games a doddle. But most people weren't just 'backing-up' their games…

» It was game-copying made easy, and we can thank most ROM's online today to devices like this.

SUPER WILD CARD

With cartridges breaking the upper limits of £59.99 in the Nineties, SNES owners often found themselves limited to how many games they can afford. While this did make game rental services a profitable business, the more savvy gamers amongst us looked for other solutions.

Piracy and cartridge copiers were no stranger to the games industry. Nintendo had already embraced the illegitimate series of 'Game Doctors' for the Famicom, which ironically used the Famicom Disk System's proprietary medium of unique disks to create counterfeit software. The SNES equivalent, however, used a more accessible method, which effectively made those expensive cartridges a non-issue.

The Super Wild Card released by Front Far East was amongst the many different flavours of backup devices which began to surface. Within each unit lay a floppy disk drive capable of reading and writing to a range of 3½-inch disk formats. Once powered up, a simplistic menu appeared on screen with the option to either back-up or load a game from the disk currently inserted. Titles exceeding the capacity of a single disk, such as the massive 48 Mbit *Tales Of Phantasia*, were broken down into multiple files often spanning a range of disks. Once the entire contents of these backups had been loaded into memory, the chosen backup would load instantly, replicating the true cartridge experience flawlessly.

Unfortunately for Nintendo, the entire process of backing up a Super Nintendo cartridge onto a disk was all too easy. Given that all you needed to duplicate a game was a minimum of one disk and the cartridge to copy from, swashbuckling gamers made the most of Blockbuster's game rental service by spending evenings 'renting' the selection of new releases. To make matters worse for the Nintendo, the disks written by the Super Wild Card were readable by any home computer with a disk drive installed. On each disk was a single ROM file (or single file broken up over multiple disks), which could be quickly copied onto another blank disk for the next well-equipped pirate gamer.

With newer games starting to exceed the capacity of a single disk, loading often became cumbersome. On the rear side of the Super Wild Card was a solution – a parallel port. With the right software available, gamers could send ROM files via a PC through a parallel port cable, in which the cartridge copier would begin to write to memory and execute the game upon completion. This quicker method was then bettered once more with the arrival of the newer and more expensive Super Wild Card DX2, a unit which allowed its disk drive to be swapped for a CD-ROM drive.

No matter which way you looked at it, the countless features made the Super Wild Card a rather inviting, although dishonest device. That said, these devices deserve our thanks as they are the main reason why the entire Super Nintendo library has been archived for future generations to come, in what we more commonly know as ROMs.

...AND THE REST

01. Super Scope

■ In an attempt to out-do one another in the light gun department, both Sega and Nintendo believed that 'bigger was better'. Light guns soon became light bazookas, and adding to the absurdity, the Super Scope was fitted with a shoulder rest and scope – making gamers feel rather awkward in front of the television.

02. Blaze Import Adapter

■ With Europe caught up in an import frenzy, meticulous gamers needed to make sure their rig was equipped for the amplitude of treats from abroad. As US games were too wide for the PAL slot, import adapters extended the cartridge slot upwards allowing all shapes and sizes to be attached.

03. Hudson Soft's Super Multitap

■ Realising the limitations of their earlier *Bomberman* outing on the NES, Hudson Soft bundled a four player adapter with its 16-bit release *Super Bomberman*. Allowing up to four players to connect into one controller port, players began to blast their way through a collection of tangled control pads and angry competitors.

04. Super Advantage/ Score Master

■ In a time when the arcades still offered unmatchable graphics and gameplay, the nearest you could get to the coin-op experience at home was with an arcade stick. Following on from the NES Advantage arcade stick, Nintendo released an updated model for the SNES known as the Super Advantage.

05. Super Everdrive and SNES PowerPak

■ Seen as the more modern alternative to the Super Wild Card, the newly introduced memory card-compatible cartridges allowed gamers to access the entire library of Super Nintendo games without emulation. Eliminating the need to invest deeply for the rarer titles, these state-of-the-art devices come as the ultimate accessory for the SNES.

06. Super Nintendo Mouse

■ Arriving bundled with the novelty graphic software package, *Mario Paint*, the compatibility of the SNES Mouse was often overlooked. Capable of working with over 50 games, the SNES Mouse offered gamers much more precision for the likes of *Sim City* and *Lemmings 2: The Tribes*.

07. Super Game Boy

■ In 1994 a device capable of playing Game Boy games on a Television was introduced to the Super Nintendo. Not only did this device allow full-screen action on games intended for a small LCD display, but it also enhanced the visuals with a range of colour and decorative borders to select Game Boy cartridges.

The Collector's Guide

TOP GAMES TO PLAY

Super Mario Kart

■ Was there ever any doubt that this manic multiplayer racer would make the list? The near-perfect kart racer still remains the pinnacle of the series to this day, and has spawned an abundance of clones.

Starwing/Star Fox

■ Utilising the powerful Super FX chip *Star Fox* was arguably one of the most groundbreaking releases during the Super Nintendo's lifespan, proving 3D was easily done in 16-bit.

The Legend of Zelda: A Link To The Past

■ Having returned after a four-year hiatus, Link was back in his only outing on the Super Nintendo, proving there was still a plethora of life in the Hyrule legacy.

Super Mario World

■ Following on from the success of the NES hit release *Super Mario Bros 3*, Mario's next appearance on the Super Nintendo strengthened the very roots of the platform genre.

Donkey Kong Country

■ While offering a perfect blend of challenges and frustration, *Donkey Kong Country* should be in every collection purely for its sensational soundtrack and attention to detail.

PLAY THESE NEXT

Super Metroid

■ Eight years after Samus' first appearance, the third game in the *Metroid* series arrived on the SNES in 1994. It offered a doomed space colony to explore and the potential to get lost deep within Planet Zebes. The UK and German releases of *Super Metroid* also came in an oversized box bundled with a 72 page strategy guide.

Pilotwings

■ Falling into the lackluster flight simulation genre, *Pilotwings* was an unexpected hit arriving on launch day for the Super Nintendo. Taking control of some stunt-hungry aviators, your job is to carefully guide a selection of aircraft through hoops and loops. Easier said than done, *Pilotwings* is one of the hardest games to master.

Mega Man X

■ Like every other popular franchise on the NES, *Mega Man* was reborn on the Super Nintendo with a multitude of new abilities. Having outgrown his clunky robotic suit, the blue bomber was now able to dash and kick-jump walls. These tricks might of helped, but it was still an insanely difficult action-platformer.

Super Castlevania IV

■ With Dracula's revival dawning on Simon Belmont, the fourth edition in the hit series *Castlevania* arrived on the Super Nintendo just months after the console's release. Offering a range of graphical trickery, elaborate challenges and a groundbreaking soundtrack, *Super Castlevania IV* confidently built upon the iconic *Castlevania* name.

F-Zero

■ If there was ever a game to demonstrate the potential power and capability of a new system, *F-Zero* was it. Using the newly included feature of Mode 7 graphics on the Super Nintendo, the ultra-fast futuristic racer took faux-3D gaming to an all new level, both graphically and where gameplay is concerned.

TOP IMPORT GAMES

Tales Of Phantasia

■ While this 48 Mbit tale never ventured outside of Japan (before its Game Boy Advance port), fanatical SNES gamers compiled an accessible English translation patch for the Japanese ROM.

Earthbound

■ As RPGs continued to stick to their traditional roots, *Earthbound* broke the mould by creating a humorous, engaging adventure to which just about anybody could relate. Boing!

Final Fantasy III/VI

■ Often battling with *Chrono Trigger* for the title of 'Best SNES RPG', *Final Fantasy VI* (*III* in the US) pushed the genre's limits further than ever with its engrossing 60-plus hour expedition.

Super Mario RPG

■ While Europe was lucky enough to get the majority of Mario's adventures, the unusual combined effort from Squaresoft and Nintendo failed to arrive, much to many PAL gamers disappointment.

Battle Cross

■ While *Super Mario Kart* was dominating sales charts worldwide, this frantic Japanese exclusive was another worthy opponent for the title of 'Best Super Nintendo Multiplayer Racer'.

IMPORT THESE NEXT

Chrono Trigger

■ Squaresoft unquestionably defined the JRPG genre in the Nineties with their vast selection of epic adventures. *Chrono Trigger* was no different, presenting itself as one of the best releases of the decade. If the storyline wasn't enough to convince you, the visuals of *Dragon Quest* and *Dragon Ball Z* artist Akira Toriyama would.

Magical Pop'n

■ In what appears to be a light-hearted side-scrolling adventure, *Magical Pop'n* lures gamers in with its cute visuals shortly before unleashing an unforgettable challenge. After rising to cult hidden-gem status, this Japanese exclusive release developed by Polestar has seen endless competition for ownership on eBay.

The King of Demons (Majyuuou)

■ Often referred to as '*Castlevania* with a gun', *The King of Demons (Majyuuou)* is yet another addition to the list of hidden gems on the SNES. Featuring detailed landscapes and character sprites, the 1995 action game by KSS leaves many gamers wondering why it missed out on an a PAL release.

DoReMi Fantasy: Milon's DokiDoki Adventure

■ The top contender for the most sickeningly cute visuals is surely this, Hudson Soft's platformer is the perfect remedy for those gloomy days. Having never left Japan, the highly desirable and enjoyable *DoReMi Fantasy* has seen an incredible rise in value over the last few years.

Ogre Battle: March of the Black Queen

■ Although many will argue *Final Fantasy Tactics* defined the turn-based tactical RPG, *Ogre Battle* has many gameplay hooks which Squaresoft's later release owes inspiration to. While commanding high price-tags today, Atlus recently re-released the game on the PSP.

The Collector's Guide

TOP RAREST PAL GAMES

X Zone

■ Hailing from Scandinavia, this incredibly rare Nordic exclusive was one of the few releases to make use of the under-loved and under-used Super Scope light gun (or should that be light bazooka?)

Cool World

■ Arriving on the Super Nintendo as a tie-in for the (highly forgettable) movie of the same name, the Spanish exclusive of *Cool World* flopped even harder than the disappointing feature film.

Whirlo

■ Continuing to prove Spain has plenty to offer the rarity hunters, this hard-to-find Namco platformer offers much more than rarity alone, as it's an adorable and addictive adventure.

Brawl Brothers

■ By the time Jaleco released this sequel to *Rival Turf*, gamers had grown tired of side-scrolling beat-'em-ups, leaving *Brawl Brothers* to be fought over in years to come.

Aero The Acrobat 2

■ Despite being a rather enjoyable follow-up to *Aero*'s last outing, *Aero The Acrobat 2* exists in numbers arguably smaller than the financial figures it commands. A rarity worth having, if only for future price.

GET THESE NEXT

Daze Before Christmas

■ Rumoured to have only been sold during Christmas of 1994, this seasonal platformer unsurprisingly remains to be one of the tougher Super Nintendo titles to locate. Given its limited holiday shelf-life and lack of re-playability, this festive release sold in very low numbers similar to the Mega Drive game of the same name.

Operation Logic Bomb

■ Arriving as a sequel to the Game Boy top-down shooter *Fortified Zone*, the German release of *Operation Logic Bomb* was a shallow game offering nothing but pretty visuals. Like many Jaleco releases for the SNES, Operation Logic Bomb comes with a rather impressive rarity as collectors attempt to locate the failed shooter.

Space Invaders

■ Despite being a runaway hit in countless 1978 arcades, the PAL Super Nintendo-port of *Space Invaders* was only released in limited quantities throughout Australia. While the game remains a timeless classic, Taito did very little with the arcade port to make it stand out against the wide range of engaging SNES games.

Super Chase HQ

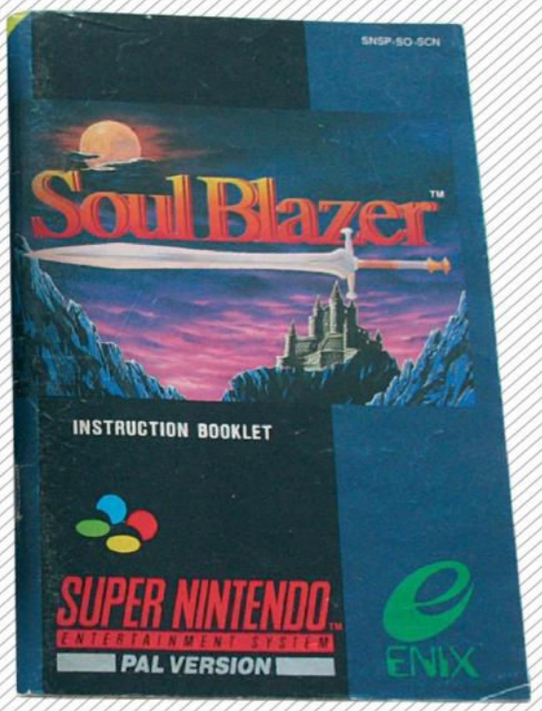
■ Adding the prefix of 'Super' to the name of an older game wasn't always a promise of enhanced gameplay and visuals. Taito took their much-loved arcade hit *Chase HQ* and sculpted an unplayable mess featuring a new in-car view. With such poor review scores, *Super Chase HQ* remained on the shelves, becoming a future rarity.

Hungry Dinosaurs

■ There's always a handful of games on any console that just don't click with gamers, *Hungry Dinosaurs* being one of them. Arriving as a two-player hybrid of *Othello* and *Snake*, this incredibly dull stone age-themed release sold poorly following a very negative reception from both gaming publications and gamers themselves.

THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN

It's commonly thought that no English language version of Soul Blazer exists. But is that true? If you turn to an unlikely place, you might just be surprised...



What makes it so special?

■ The most common versions of *Soul Blazer* hail from Europe and are in French or German, rendering it unplayable for the rest of the continent. Unknown to those who continue to import Enix's hit from abroad, an English language version of Soul Blazer has been available all these years, hidden deep within Scandinavia.

Why is it so expensive?

■ While the English language version is highly desirable, there's often another reason for the fluster of bids. The common European versions featured much plainer alternate artwork, surrounded by unattractive black borders. The harder to find game comes with a more attractive cover contained within stylish navy blue borders.

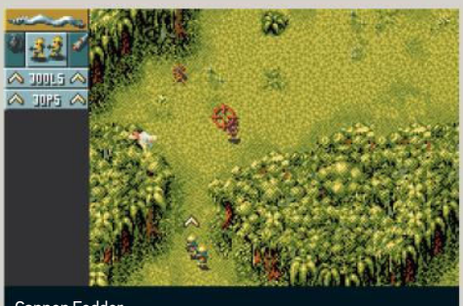
What makes it hard to find?

■ Acquiring the Scandinavian exclusive is no easy feat. Given the nearest to a Nordic eBay is Trader. The possibility of locating it, combined with finding a seller willing to accept offers from abroad, makes obtaining *Soul Blazer* a challenge. Those unwilling to embrace the struggle will have to wait for one to surface on eBay.

The Collector's Guide

THE SUPER NINTENDO GAMES YOU NEED TO OWN

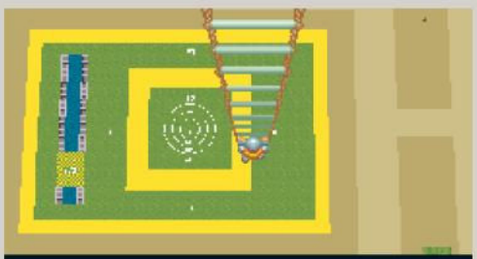
- ACME Animation Factory
- ActRaiser
- ActRaiser 2
- Addams Family Values
- The Addams Family
- The Addams Family: Pugsley's Scavenger Hunt
- The Adventures Of Batman & Robin
- The Adventures Of Mighty Max
- Aero The Acro-Bat
- Aero The Acro-Bat 2
- Aguri Suzuki F-1 Super Driving
- Aladdin (Disney's)
- Alien Vs. Predator
- Alien 3
- All-American Championship Football
- Animaniacs
- Another World
- Ardy Lightfoot
- Arkanoid
- Astérix
- Astérix & Obélix
- Axelay
- Batman Returns
- BattleClash
- Battletoads In Battlemaniacs
- Beauty & The Beast (Disney's)
- Beethoven: The Ultimate Canine Caper
- BioMetal
- BlackHawk
- The Blues Brothers
- Boxing Legends Of The Ring
- Brawl Brothers: Rival Turf! 2
- Breath Of Fire II
- Bubsy II
- Cannon Fodder
- Captain Commando
- Casper
- Castlevania: Vampire's Kiss
- Chuck Rock
- Congo's Caper
- Cool Spot
- Cool World
- Cybernator
- Darius Twin
- Daze Before Christmas
- The Death And Return Of Superman
- Demon's Crest



Cannon Fodder

Mega Man X

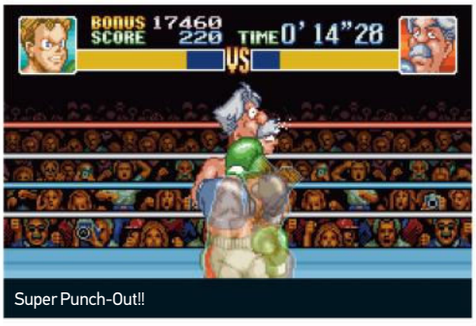
- Desert Strike: Return To The Gulf
- Dino City
- Donald In Maui Mallard
- Donkey Kong Country
- Donkey Kong Country 2: Diddy's Kong Quest
- Donkey Kong Country 3: Dixie Kong's Double Trouble!
- Double Dragon V: The Shadow Falls
- Dragon Ball Z
- Dragon Ball Z: Hyper Dimension
- Dragon Ball Z: La Légende SAIEN
- Dragon Ball Z: Ultimate Menace
- Earth Defence Force
- Earthworm Jim
- Earthworm Jim 2
- Equinox
- F-Zero
- Family Dog
- Fatal Fury 2
- Final Fight
- Final Fight 2
- Final Fight 3
- The Firemen
- Flashback
- Foreman For Real
- Ghoul Patrol
- Gods
- Goof Troop (Disney's)
- GP-1
- Hagane: The Final Conflict
- Harvest Moon
- The Humans
- Hungry Dinosaurs
- Hyper V-Ball
- HyperZone
- Illusion Of Time
- Incantation
- Indiana Jones' Greatest Adventures
- International Sensible Soccer: World Champions: Limited Edition Featuring World Cup Teams
- International Superstar Soccer Deluxe
- International Tennis Tour
- Jack Nicklaus Golf
- Jimmy Connors Pro Tennis Tour
- Joe & Mac: Caveman Ninja
- Joe & Mac
- Kid Klown In Crazy Chase
- Killer Instinct
- King Of Dragons
- Kirby's Dream Course
- Kirby's Fun Pack
- Kirby's Ghost Trap
- Knights Of The Round
- Legend
- The Legend Of The Mystical Ninja
- The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past
- Lemmings
- Lemmings 2: The Tribes
- Lethal Enforcers
- Loony Toons Basketball
- The Lost Vikings
- The Lost Vikings II: Norse By Norsewest
- Lufia
- Magic Sword
- The Magical Quest Starring Mickey Mouse
- Mario Paint
- Marko's Magic Football
- Marvel Super Heroes In War Of The Games
- Mega Man 7


Pilotwings

- Mega Man X
- Mega Man X2
- Mega Man X3
- Metal Combat: Falcon's Revenge
- Mickey Mania
- Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament
- Mohawk & Headphone Jack
- Mortal Kombat II
- Mr Do!
- Ms Pac-Man
- NBA Jam: Tournament Edition
- Ninjawarriors: The New Generation
- On The Ball
- Operation: Logic Bomb
- Oscar
- Out To Lunch (Pierre Le Chef Is)
- Pac-Attack
- Pac-Man 2: The New Adventures
- Parodius
- Phalanx
- Pilotwings
- Pink Goes To Hollywood
- Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure
- Plok
- Pocky & Rocky
- Pocky & Rocky 2
- Pop'n Twin Bee
- Pop'n Twin Bee: Rainbow Bell Adventures
- Power Drive

EXTREMELY RARE	VERY RARE	RARE	UNCOMMON	COMMON	VERY COMMON
Games that have less than a few dozen known copies available.	Very hard to come by. Expect to see only a couple of copies per year.	You should be able to source these in a reasonable amount of time.	You won't find them straight away, but you will after a search.	Always just a click away for the average collector.	So common you'll find them in most bundles of games you buy.

- Power Rangers Zeo: Battle Racers
- Prince Of Persia
- Prince Of Persia 2
- Putty Squad
- Puzzle Bobble: Bust-A-Move
- R-Type III: The Third Lightning
- Radical Rex
- Realm
- The Ren & Stimpy Show: Time Warp
- The Ren & Stimpy Show: Veediots!
- Rock 'N' Roll Racing
- Sailormoon
- Saturday Night Slammasters
- Secret Of Evermore
- Secret Of Mana
- Sensible Soccer: European Champions
- Shadowrun
- Shanghai II: Dragon's Eye
- Side Pocket
- SimCity
- Skyblazer
- Smash Tennis
- The Smurfs
- The Smurfs: Travel The World
- Soccer Kid
- Sonic Blast Man
- Soul Blazer
- Space Invaders
- Spanky's Quest
- Sparkster
- Spawn (Todd McFarlane's): The Video Game
- Starwing
- Street Fighter Alpha 2
- Street Fighter II
- Street Fighter II Turbo
- Street Racer
- Striker
- Stunt Race FX
- Sunset Riders
- Super Adventure Island
- Super Adventure Island II
- Super Aleste
- Super BC Kid
- Super Battleship: The Naval Combat Game
- Super Bomberman
- Super Bomberman 2
- Super Bomberman 3



Super Punch-Out!!

- Super Castlevania IV
- Super Chase HQ
- Super Dany
- Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts
- Super Ice Hockey
- Super Mario All-Stars
- Super Mario All-Stars & Super Mario World
- Super Mario Kart
- Super Mario World
- Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island
- Super Metroid
- Super Off Road
- Super Pang
- Super Probotector: Alien Rebels
- Super Punch-Out!!
- Super Putty
- Super Smash TV
- Super Star Wars
- Super Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back
- Super Star Wars: Return Of The Jedi
- Super Street Fighter II
- Super Strike Gunner
- Super SWIV
- Super Tennis
- Super Turrican
- Super Turrican 2
- Super Widget
- Syvalion
- Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles IV: Turtles In Time
- Terranigma
- Tetris & Dr. Mario
- Tetris Attack
- The Chaos Engine
- The Great Circus Mystery Starring Mickey & Minnie
- The Lion King (Disney's)
- Thomas The Tank Engine & Friends
- Time Trax
- Tiny Toons Adventures: Buster Busts Loose!
- TKO Super Championship Boxing
- Top Gear
- Top Gear 2
- Top Gear 3000
- Toys: Let The Toy Wars Begin!
- True Golf Classics: Pebble Beach Golf Links
- UN Squadron
- Unirally
- Venom/Spider-Man: Separation Anxiety
- Wario's Woods
- WarpSpeed
- Whirlo
- Whizz
- Wild Guns
- World Cup Striker
- Worms
- WWF Wrestlemania: The Arcade Game
- X Zone
- Yoshi's Cookie
- Yoshi's Safari
- Zero: The Kamikaze Squirrel
- Zombies

Collector Q&A

Bryan Paton has been collecting SNES games for years and has amassed an impressive collection

How long have you been collecting for?
I have been collecting Super Famicom games since about 1998. Obviously I had a SNES in the early Nineties, but with the high price and only having pocket money, it was hardly collecting. When I started work in 1996 I suddenly had cash flow. At first all my cash went on Japanese N64 releases but after a couple of years I returned to my roots and I began my Super Famicom collection in earnest.

What does the SNES offer over its peers?
At the time it was easily the most powerful mainstream home console and everything looked amazing. Arcade titles like *Street Fighter II* just blew me away, and many of the most popular franchises have had their best instalments on the SNES. I think the sheer number of quality tiles across all genres is its strength.

Why do you prefer collecting Japanese games to their PAL counterparts?
I swapped a PAL copy of *Pilotwings* for a SFC version of *Hook* and as soon as I saw the box and the design, you could say I was 'hooked' (sorry). The aesthetics of the Japanese designs are, in my opinion, miles ahead of the Western releases. The sheer number of titles available in Japan puts the PAL catalogue to shame. Back in the day, magazines such as *Super Play* influenced my love of Japanese gaming and Japan has such an interesting culture, I think gaming is just an extension of that interest.

What's the most expensive game you own?
Rendering Ranger R2. It goes for silly money now, I've seen copies exchange hands for £500. I was lucky and actually picked it up in 1998 on a trip for about £45 new.

How important are mint boxes to you?
I wont even consider buying a game if it isn't complete and in good condition. Nintendo weren't thinking of the future when they decided cardboard was the way to go and it's getting harder to find games in top condition now, another reason the SNES commands such high prices.

What does your family/wife think of your hobby?
My wife is very understanding of my collection and has even been know to buy me SFC games for my birthday, not that I leave my wanted list lying around deliberately.

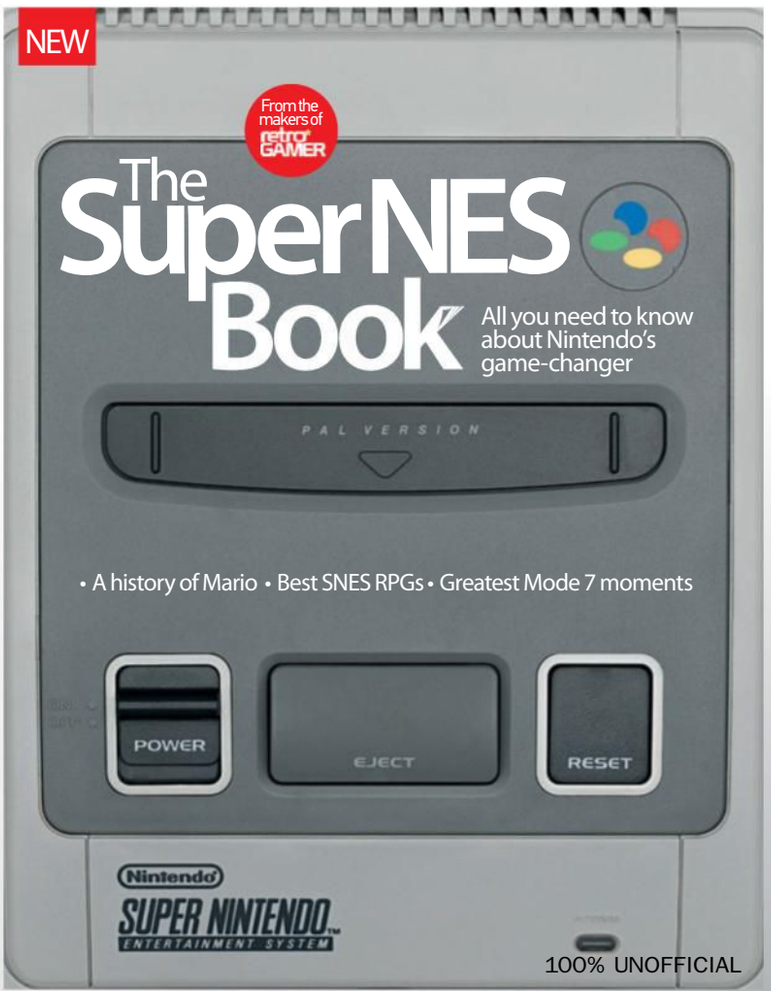
What advice would you give to other gamers interesting in collecting for the SNES?
Decide exactly what games and condition you want them in, and set a budget. Recently the SNES/SFC has become very expensive to collect. I was lucky and got in years ago, and gathered the majority of my 550 boxed games before the price boom. Know what you're getting into.

*** Rarity guide courtesy of RETRO COLLECT Head to retrocollect.com for more information**

Everything you need to know about Sega's 16-bit masterpiece & Nintendo's game changer

The Story of Sonic • Mega-CD

FIFA • Perfect Ten • Shinobi



A History of Mario • Zelda

Star Wars • Unmissable RPG's